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Washtenaw Jewish News
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WASHTENAW
JEWISH NEWS

APRIL 2026 Nissan/Iyar 5786 Volume XXVI Number 7 FREE

Spotlight to Summer: Celebrating 40 Years of the JCC

By Marci Sturman, Director of Development, Ann Arbor JCC

Leslie Bash

The Jewish Community Center of Greater Ann Arbor will host "Spotlight to Summer," an evening that will shine a light on community, culture, and connection while celebrating 40 years of the JCC serving Washtenaw County. The event will take place Tuesday, June 2 at 6 p.m. at the Kensington Hotel.

For four decades, the JCC has been a vibrant hub for Jewish life — bringing people together through cultural programs, educational opportunities, wellness activities, holiday celebrations, and community events. "Spotlight to Summer" will celebrate that legacy while looking ahead to the next chapter of connection and engagement.

Taking center stage during the evening will be a tribute to Leslie Bash, who served as Executive Director of the JCC of Greater Ann Arbor from 2001–2012. A passionate community builder throughout her career in the JCC movement — including leadership roles in Connecticut and Detroit — Leslie helped elevate Jewish arts and cultural programming through initiatives such as book fairs, film festivals, and community celebrations that enriched Jewish life and brought people together.

The evening will also shine the spotlight on entertainment with a special performance by Sidney Friedman, an internationally acclaimed entertainer who blends music, mind-reading, and interactive performance into a show filled with amazement, humor, and audience participation.

"Spotlight to Summer" is not only a celebration but also an important fundraiser supporting JCC programming. Proceeds

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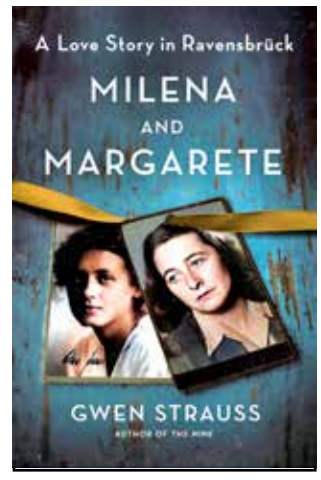
Jewish Book Series April event: Milena and Margarete by Gwen Strauss

By Eva Kubacki, Cultural Arts Coordinator, Ann Arbor JCC



Come join the Ann Arbor JCC for its April Jewish Book Series event, an in-person talk with Gwen Strauss, author of *Milena and Margarete: A Love Story in Ravensbrück*. The program will occur on Tuesday, April 7, from 5–6:30 p.m. Registration for this event is free and can be found on JLive.app.

Gwen Strauss is a *New York Times* bestselling author who has written two narrative nonfiction books, *The Nine: The True Story of a Band of Women Who Survived the Worst of Nazi Germany* and *Milena and Margarete*. Strauss spoke about *The Nine* at the 2022 Ann Arbor Jewish Book Festival. These books, in addition to her other works, focus on and explore the deep friendships and relationships between women in concentration camps during the Holocaust. Her work spotlights these often untold stories of these women and their survival beyond the concentration camps.

Milena and Margarete tells the true love story of Milena Jesenska and Margarete Buber-Naumann. The two women met in 1940 in Ravensbrück concentration camp, where they fell in love, risking their lives in the camp even further. However, the end of the war was not the end of their troubles. Lesbians were stigmatized during this time, and the survivors, like Milena and Margarete, kept silent.

This book tells their story of love, strength, and perseverance through a world that wanted to erase them. It highlights and uplifts stories of LGBTQ love in the Holocaust, a topic that only recently has started to be explored. ■

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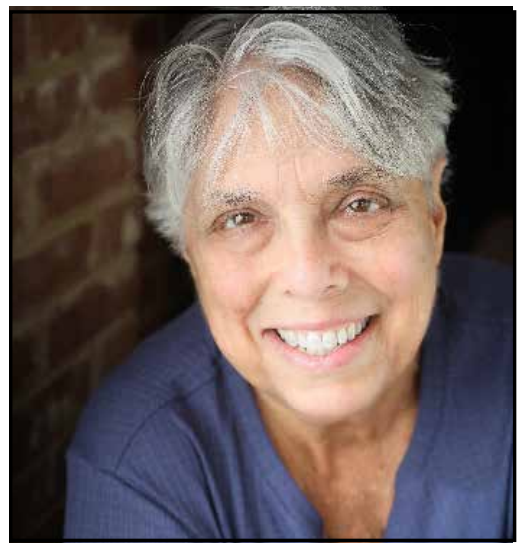

Wanting an end to war

As the April Calendar on page 7 shows, we begin to count the Omer on the night of April 2. Counting the Omer, the 49 days between Pesach and Shavuot, is my Jewish reset time. I use and recommend the app Omer-Counter by Rabbi David Seidenberg and David Cooper. I would love to hear from you if you count, too.

I'm trying to achieve the distance of a bird's eye view of this month's "Operation Epic Fury," and "Operation Roaring Lion" or "Operation Shield of Judah," perhaps seeing this war as a point in the scope of history.

The March 12 truck ramming into Temple Israel in West Bloomfield is constantly on my mind, alongside reports of bombs dropping in Israel, Lebanon, Iran, and so many locations in the Middle East. This touches us locally in Washtenaw, too. Local musician Neil Alexander contributed to the WJN his firsthand account of racing to the miklat/bomb shelter in Jerusalem while visiting his daughter, Miriam (see pages 18 and 19).

This month, too, there are books and films and poetry, and more films. There are symposia and fairs, and café gatherings: Washtenaw in Spring.

Last night I went to a text study where the source sheets had excerpts from W.E.B Du Bois, Grace Paley, Bernice Johnson Reagon, and Marlon Riggs. The session was led by Sara Marcus, author of *Political Disappointment: A Cultural History from Reconstruction to the AIDS Crisis*. My kind of Jewish text study: flying back and forth across time, including texts from the 20th Century canon-in-the-making. Each piece asked questions about the scope of a lifetime within the scope of history. Written in the early 1970's Paley's short story "Wants" has the protagonist stating, "I *had* promised my children to end the war before they grew up."

I had wanted what Paley wanted, and despite the delays, we still have the prayer.

Oseh shalom, bimromav/May the One who makes peace in the high heavens, grant peace to us, to all Israel, and to all the world.

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Phone numbers, websites, and addresses of organizations frequently listed in the calendar:

Ann Arbor Orthodox Minyan (AAOM): 1429 Hill Street, 248-408-3269, annarborminyan.org
Ann Arbor Reconstructionist Congregation (AARC): 2935 Birch Hollow Drive, 734-445-1910, aarecon.org
Beth Israel Congregation (BIC): 2000 Washtenaw Ave, 734-665-9897, bethisrael-aa.org
Chabad House: 715 Hill Street, 734-995-3276, jewmich.com
Eastern Michigan University Center for Jewish Studies (EMU): www.emich.edu/jewish-studies/
Frankel Center: 202 S. Thayer St., lsa.umich.edu/judaic/
Jewish Community Center (JCC): 2935 Birch Hollow Drive, 745-971-0990, jccannarbor.org
Jewish Cultural Society (JCS): 2935 Birch Hollow Drive, 734-975-9872, jewishculturalsociety.org
Jewish Family Services (JFS): 2245 South State Street, 734-769-0209, jfsannarbor.org
Jewish Federation: 2939 Birch Hollow Drive, 734-677-0100, jewishannarbor.org
Pardes Hannah: 2010 Washtenaw Ave, 734-761-5324, pardeshannah.org
Temple Beth Emeth (TBE): 2309 Packard Road, 734-665-4744, templebethemeth.org
UM Hillel: 1429 Hill Street 734-769-0500, michiganhillel.org

Coming soon

In Step With Sam: Honoring a legacy of activism, community, and service

By Monica Woll Rosen

Monica Woll Rosen

The Huron River flows steadily as a gentle wind rustles through the trees of Ann Arbor's Arboretum. I sit quietly on a bench, listening to birds chirping in front of a tree dedicated to my sister by her college friends after she passed away. A simple plaque marks the spot: "In memory of Samantha Woll, who will always be remembered for her tireless activism and desire to make the world a better place."

On June 7, 2026, several hundred people will gather at this special spot for the third annual "In Step With Sam" Legacy Run/Walk. The event honors the life and enduring impact of my sister, Samantha Woll, z"l, whose memory continues to inspire after she was tragically murdered outside her Detroit home on October 21, 2023, at age 40. The route follows a breathtaking path through the arboretum, a place Samantha cherished, and offers participants a moment for reflection, intention-setting, and connection.

Born and raised in metro Detroit and a proud graduate of the University of Michigan, Sam was deeply committed to Judaism and was serving as the President of the Isaac Agree Downtown Synagogue in Detroit at the time of her death. Her influence, however, extended far beyond her own faith. She had a remarkable ability to unite individuals with diverse backgrounds and beliefs, a quality that led her to spearhead multiple interfaith and cross-cultural initiatives. Samantha was truly an inspirational force; passionately advocating for inclusivity, always looking for the good in everyone, and providing an unwavering voice for the most vulnerable and marginalized in society. Sam's commitment to tikkun olam was evident in all she pursued, including her work with U.S. Senator Elissa Slotkin, Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel, and State Senator Stephanie Chang. She was a cherished leader, passionate advocate, and beloved friend.

In the years preceding her death, Sam embraced a new challenge: running. Sam's daily mile run became a ritual that was calming, empowering, and restorative. Following her passing, our family, friends, and community wanted to honor her legacy in a way that truly captured Sam's spirit. In June 2024, during her birthday month, "In Step With Sam" was launched, inviting participants to gather in Burns Park and journey through the Arboretum to "Sam's tree." The event has grown, bringing together over 500 participants who share in the vision of keeping Sam's memory, spirit, and values alive.

The Legacy Run is inclusive to all. Whether choosing a 5K, 1-mile, or kids' fun run, each participant receives a T-shirt, and no running experience is required — the emphasis is on thoughtful participation rather than competition. For those who prefer not to run or walk, a service project with Repair the World Detroit offers an alternate path to honor Sam's commitment to community; last year, over 400 hygiene kits were assembled for those in need. Families enjoy bounce houses, sidewalk chalk, sports games, and refreshments including a coffee truck and Kona Ice. A virtual option also allows participants to join from anywhere, and beginning in 2026, groups in New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles, Washington D.C., and Tel Aviv will gather locally to take part in the run together.

All proceeds from the run support the Samantha Woll Center for Jewish Detroit, a new hub for Jewish life in the city. Last year, the event raised over $10,000.

Sam's unwavering dedication to social justice and bridging communities left an indelible mark on both those who knew her and those who never had the chance to meet her. She practiced respectful dialogue, built friendships across the political spectrum, and led with compassion — a true embodiment of Jewish values.

The "In Step With Sam" Legacy Run welcomes those who knew Samantha intimately and those simply moved by her example, inviting each participant to reflect: How will I stay In Step With Sam?

For more information and to register, please scan the QR code, visit http://runsignup.com/Race/MI/AnnArbor/InStepWithSam or email instepwithsam@gmail.com. ■

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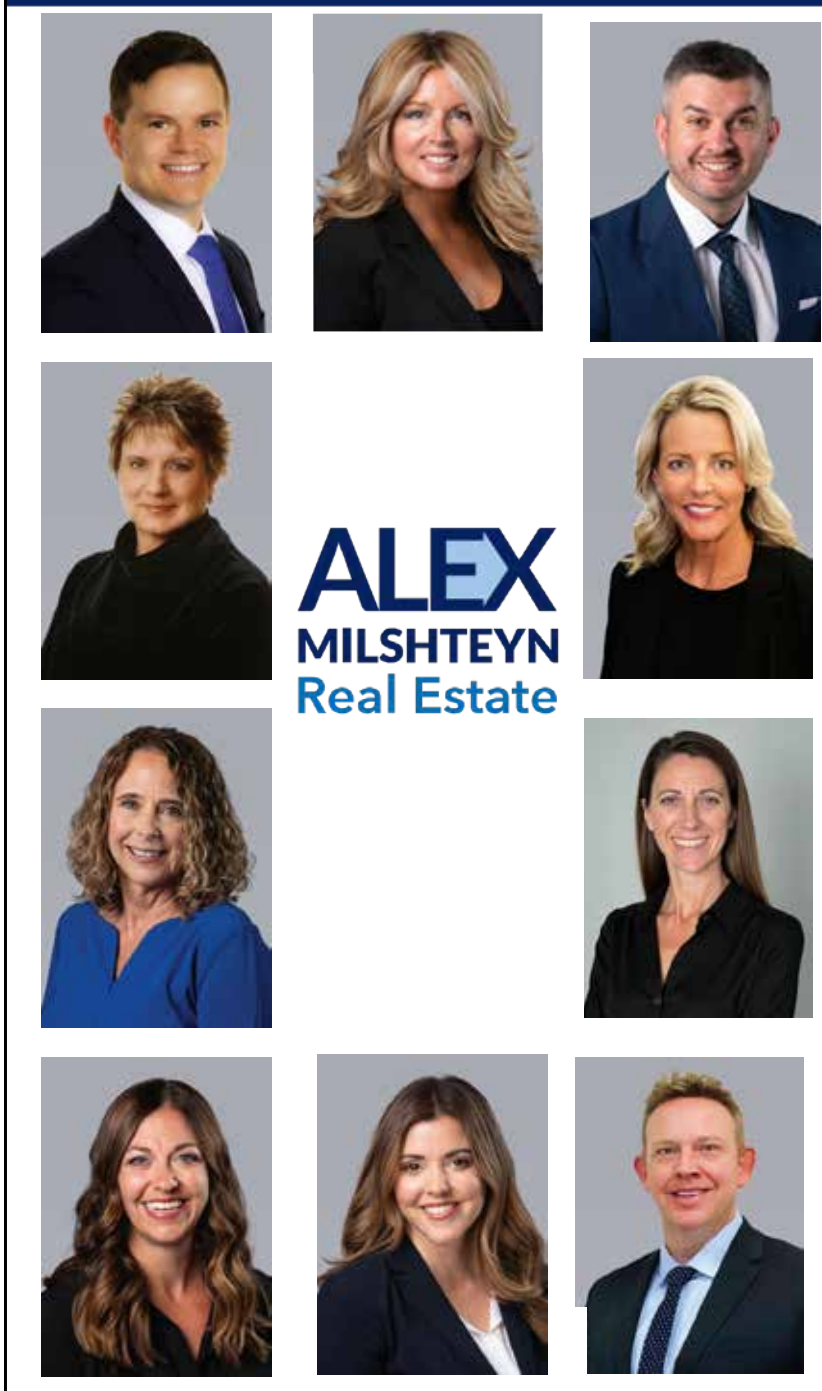

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Community

HDS academic fair: a year of learning on display

By Orit Aviran

Hebrew Day School students from Gan through 5th grade recently showcased their work to parents and visitors at the school's annual Academic Fair, an evening that highlighted the range and depth of the Hebrew Day School dual curriculum.

Projects ranged from personal narratives and "Get to Know Me" presentations in Hebrew, to complex research projects and explorations of biblical texts, modern culture, science and history. Students worked both independently and collaboratively, using a variety of research methods and materials, with many classes incorporating recycled and repurposed materials into their displays.

The fair is not a one-time showcase, but a culmination of learning that takes place throughout the year. Alongside mastering new content, students developed research and planning skills and practiced presenting their work to a live audience.

The Academic Fair is an opportunity to see the school's three core values in action: Academic Excellence and Discovery, Community and Character, and Jewish Life and Learning, reflected across both General and Judaic studies.

Yasher Koach to our students and faculty on their curiosity, creativity, and hard work.

For more information about Hebrew Day School of Ann Arbor, visit hdsaa.org or contact office@hdsaa.org ■

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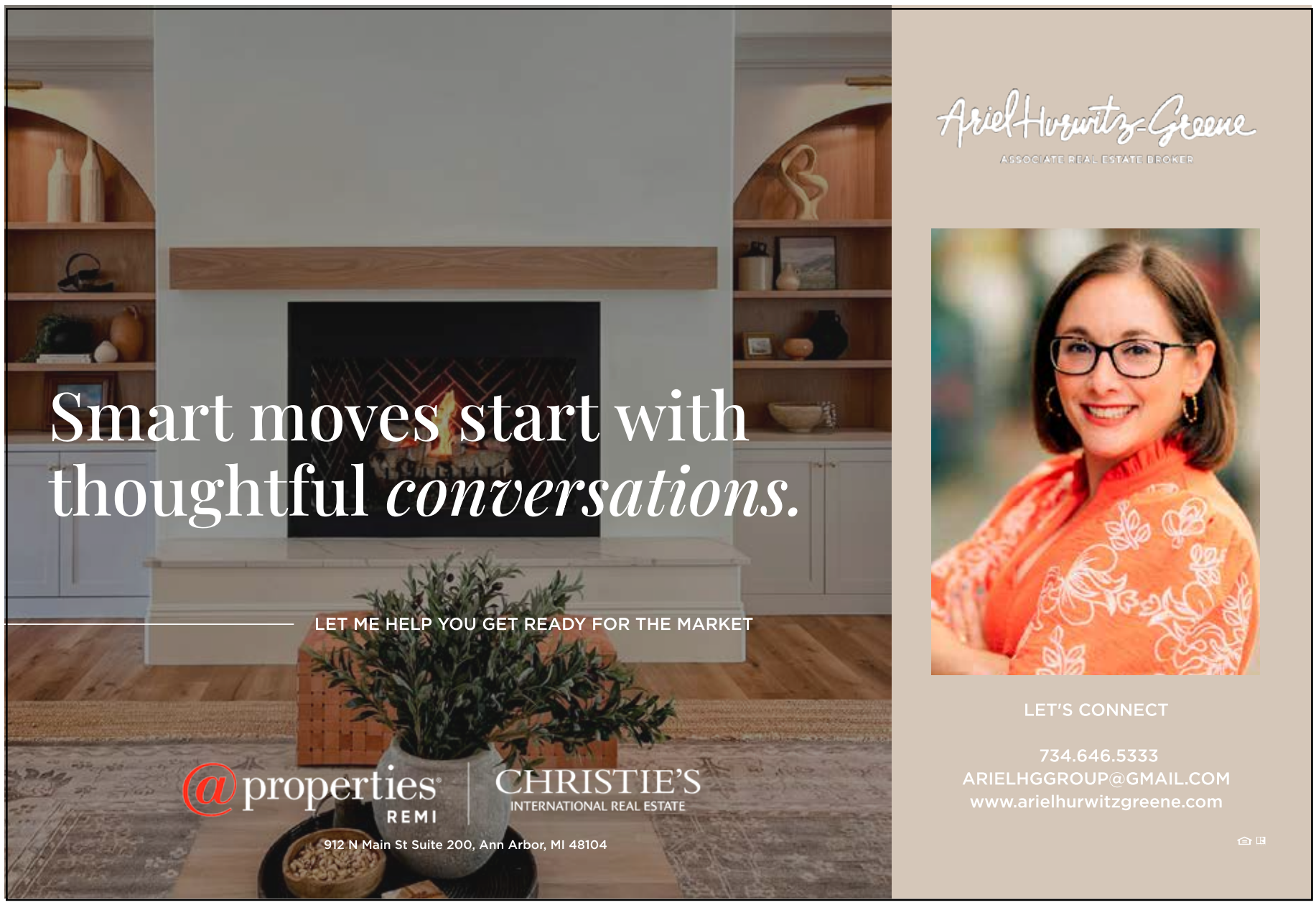


Memory Cafés and the arts

By Ari Smith

Dementia Friendly Services (DFS), a community-based nonprofit in Saline, has been offering Memory Cafés as a way to bring those who are experiencing memory loss, dementia, and Alzheimer's with their care partners together for connection, creativity, and enjoyment since 2020. Now, with a grant from CultureSource, DFS is partnering with Meet Me With the Arts (MMWTA), an arts and culture organization with a strong track record of engaging older adults in Southeast Michigan, to expand their offerings with a new arts-based Memory Café every two months beginning March 27th.

"Memory cafés in general are a social opportunity for people living with brain changes, memory loss, or dementia, and for their loved ones," says Lori Venable, a founding member and organizer of the Memory Cafés. "It's not a respite service where caregivers drop their loved ones off, it's more 'respite-with.' It's about socializing together, having fun, and making connections with other people who are on the journey."

The MMWTA Memory Café is a thoughtfully designed, multi-sensory engagement program that creates meaningful and joyful encounters with the arts. Each session fosters connection, imagination, and emotional resonance through shared experiences in visual art, music, movement, poetry, and storytelling. The March 27 Meet Me With the Arts Memory Cafe will be a drum circle led by Sundance, a drummer who has spent years learning and teaching drums in Ann Arbor. Attendees will have the opportunity to listen, participate, and learn about the cultures behind the drums and techniques, as well as connect with their loved ones in a fun, low-pressure environment. DFS has plans for many more events, such as learning about artists and creating art based on their artistic styles, collaborative creative writing projects, and Irish dance performances.

"Art and music speak to people in such a distinct way," Venable continues. "People just don't lose that appreciation — there's no right or wrong answer with art. Your abilities might change, and my work might look different from yours, but it's not better or worse than anyone else's. We get to create without judgement and be able to have that connection and expression very freely. No matter what colors they use, people will find it beautiful and not be told they're doing it wrong."

Dignity, a lack of judgement, and building community are critical to the creation of these spaces, Venable told the WJN. "When you're on a dementia journey, isolation can be so incapacitating. Even people who may not be capable of a whole lot of socialization or communication with another can get a lot out of the group experiences. You may start worrying about hard days and needing to leave early, and this is a place where nobody needs to worry about judgement. Everyone is on their own journey, and they understand.

"We want to offer more dignity and decrease stigma surrounding aging and memory loss — you can have a beautiful, productive life even with a degenerative illness. You don't need to waste away with the curtains drawn, you can have fun and joy and beauty together."■

Pamela Schuller finds the unapologetically funny in OCD and TS

The Eastern Michigan University Center for Jewish Studies is partnering with Hillel at EMU and the Hillel Campus Alliance of Michigan to bring internationally known disability and mental health advocate and professional stand-up comedian Pamela Schuller to perform on the EMU campus. Pamela, who grew up Jewish and incorporates various Jewish references into her performances, was diagnosed with Tourette Syndrome and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder as a teenager. Over time, these obstacles and challenges became the very fuel that propels her. Pamela doesn't just "tolerate" what makes her different; she embraces it, loves it, and finds the funny in it. And she challenges her audiences to do the same.

Now an internationally known disability and mental health advocate and professional stand-up comedian, Pamela's stories of growing up in a body she had no control over are engaging, powerful, a little bit heart-wrenching, and unapologetically funny. She has spoken and performed in seven countries, in every state in the U.S., and for more than 100,000 kids, teens, and professionals. She can be seen on Netflix, Buzzfeed, Doctor Mike Videos, NBC, and she has worked on inclusion and accessibility with Disney, Google, Wells Fargo, and United Airlines, to name just a few.

Pamela will perform Monday April 13 at 7 p.m. in the EMU Student Center (900 Oakwood St., Ypsilanti, MI 48197) in Ballroom B. This event is free and open to the public but pre-registration is required. You can register here on the EMU Jewish Studies website, https://www.emich.edu/jewish-studies/events/.

Questions can be directed to jewish.studies@emich.edu. ■

New learning opportunity

By Rabbi Aura Ahuvia

Has the Jewish prayer service ever left you hanging? Wondering why people would ever attend something so boring or arcane repeatedly? Once upon a time, those were my questions, too. The first time I heard the siddur, prayer book, described as a treasure chest (by scholar Franz Rosenzweig), I was mystified.

But then I had a change of heart. It surprised even me who, until that moment, had been a "God-skeptic." (Although, to be clear, there is no agenda here to convince you that God exists. There is room for "spiritual but not religious.") Through a series of meaningful classes and conversations, I finally got the opportunity to ask my forbidden questions, wrestle with assumptions, and arrive at a new level of curiosity that set me on fire. I've felt this fire ever since. Rabbi Eliana Light summed it up well when she stated enigmatically, "The words are not the prayer."

Feeling at least a little curious? Try out the new study series called "Opening the Siddur," designed to walk you through the basics of Jewish prayer perhaps in ways you've never tried before. All members of the Jewish community are invited to attend.

The study series will take place Sundays, 3 to 5: p.m. on April 26, May 31, June 28, July 26 and August 30. Location will be disclosed upon registration at the Pardes Hannah website, https://pardeshannah.org/. Cost is $25 per class, or $100 for the series for non-PH members, free for members (cost of class can be applied retroactively for those who become members of Pardes Hannah). For more information, email Rabbi Aura Ahuvia at PsychedelicRabbi@gmail.com.

Upcoming Pardes Hannah events

April 11 Shabbat Morning Services
With Rabbis Aura and Elliot
10 – 12:30 a.m. in person or online

April 16 Rosh Chodesh Iyar Circle with
Lucinda, Megan, Linda D. and Shira Orit
7-8:30 p.m. online only

April 18 Study Session with Reb Elliot
Cycle of the Jewish Spiritual Year: Crossing the Sea and Sefirat ha-Omer
3 – 5 p.m. in person or online

April 26 Study Session with Rabbi Aura
Opening the Siddur: Connecting with the Sparks
3 – 5 p.m. in person (register for location) or online

For more details, go to the Pardes Hannah website, https://pardeshannah.org/.■

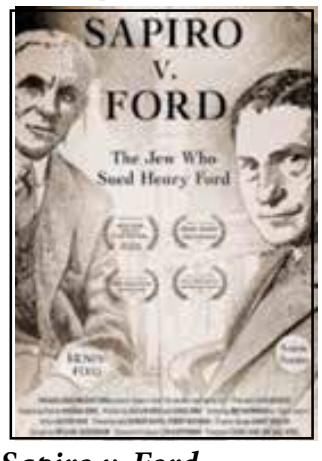
Organize your family photos

The Washtenaw Jewish Genealogy Circle will offer a free presentation on organizing family photos on Tuesday, April 21, at 7 p.m. This Zoom presentation, presented by WJGC member Bob Merion, will cover strategic approaches to tackling your unorganized boxes and albums filled with family photos. Practical tips, tricks, and examples will be offered for culling (deciding which photos to keep), digitizing (how to scan), cataloging (choosing a photo storage platform), curation (adding dates, identities, and captions), and access (adding photos to family trees; creating family storybooks; creating albums and slideshows for life cycle events). Contact the Washtenaw Jewish Genealogy Circle at washjewishgencircle@googlegroups.com for more information and a registration link for this event. ■

25th Annual Ann Arbor Jewish Film Festival

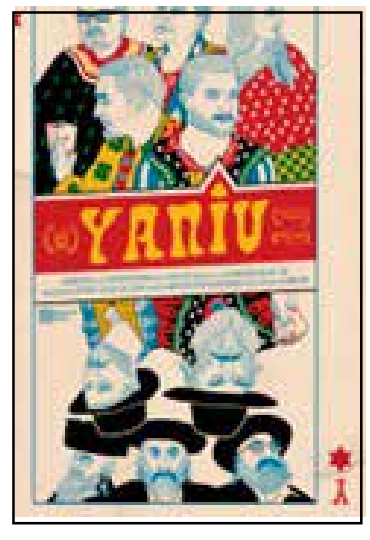
By Eva Kubacki, Cultural Arts Coordinator, Ann Arbor JCC

The Ann Arbor Jewish Film festival returns this year from May 3 to May 13, bringing a wide array of diverse stories of Jewish culture through cinema. This festival, now in its 25th year, is a staple of Jewish cultural connection and engagement in Ann Arbor, uniting people in contemplation and enjoyment of a wide array of Jewish experiences. Here is just a glimpse of some of the feature films that will be a part of the festival in 2026.



Sapiro v. Ford

Prepare to dive into the gripping true story of Aaron Sapiro, the young Jewish lawyer who dared to sue Henry Ford for his rampant anti-Jewish publications. The narrative of Sapiro's life and the libel suit he filed is told through an engaging documentary style. The story itself is fascinating and deeply connected to Michigan, as Ford had his Motor Company in Detroit. Beyond the facts of this case, *Sapiro v. Ford* explores broader narratives of antisemitism in America, how it differs and developed, and the ways it remains the same as other iterations of antisemitism.



Yaniv

Come experience the comedic and heartfelt with *Yaniv*, a modern comedy centering around a Jewish high school teacher in the Bronx. When he loses funding for his theater program, he convinces his friend — who is a fellow teacher and recovering gambling addict — to help him fund the program through cheating at an underground card game run by the Hasidic Jewish community. Starring Ben Ducoff, Eli Boskey, Catherine Cutin, and Annabel Steven, *Yaniv* is bound to charm its audience and make you laugh.

The Sea

Step into the world of Khaled, a 12-year-old Palestinian boy on his way to visit the sea for the first time with his class. However, at the checkpoint, Israeli authorities deny his entry. Khaled decides to make the dangerous journey to the sea on his own by sneaking into Israel, entering a whole new world rife with obstacles for him. When his father, Ribhi, hears that Khaled has crossed the border on foot, he immediately goes after him, risking his own arrest and loss of job. The film stars Khalifa Natour, Muhammad Gazawi, Marlene Bajali, and Hilla Sarjon. This story is bound to pull at your heart strings through the hope of a child and the universal love between father and son. *The Sea* is a film that transcends borders through the power of familial love, empathy, and hope for a better future.

The Ann Arbor Jewish Film Festival is far more than screenings; it's a way to connect to the multifaceted complexities of Jewish life, to highlight the voices of Jewish artists, to find community, and to celebrate the diversity of Jews throughout time and around the world. The selections for this year are bound to have something for everyone.

Stay tuned for the full film lineup, screening schedule, and special events! More information can be found on JLive.app and at https://jccannarbor.org/film-festival/.

This amazing festival would not be possible without the generous support of our wonderful sponsors and committee members. We are immensely thankful for their dedication to building this wonderful community around Jewish films and voices. To learn more about sponsorship opportunities and how you can help support the Ann Arbor Jewish Film Festival, please email marcisturman@jccannarbor.org or visit our website at https://jccannarbor.org/film-festival/. Your support is essential to the future flourishing of the program! ■

Drew Coel receives "36 Under 36" award

Drew Coel

At the beginning of this calendar year, Drew Coel, the Ann Arbor JCC's Marketing and Program Associate, was selected as a member of the *Detroit Jewish News* 2026 "36 Under 36" cohort.

This prestigious award is given to young leaders who are making an impact on the Metro Detroit Jewish community. Drew is the sole recipient from Ann Arbor in this year's cohort, and her efforts were honored at a joyous celebration in Royal Oak last month.

Drew has been in her position at the Ann Arbor JCC for the last three and a half years. In addition to her marketing and communication responsibilities, which include writing articles for the Washtenaw Jewish News, Drew also manages the JCC's Amster Art Gallery, assists in the implementation of seasonal cultural programming and in the planning for the annual Ann Arbor Jewish Book, Film, and Music Festivals.

Most recently, Drew has taken on the role of organizing the JCC's annual comedy night fundraiser, as well as the role of delegation head of Team Ann Arbor-Nahalal for the JCC Maccabi Games, the largest Jewish teen engagement program in the world. In 2025, she took a group of 21 teenagers from both Ann Arbor and Nahalal, Israel, to the JCC Maccabi Campus Games at the University of Pittsburgh, the first ever large-scale games to be held on a college campus. Drew is looking forward to the 2026 JCC Maccabi Games in Toronto, and has grown Team Ann Arbor-Nahalal to 24 athletes.

A New England native, Drew received her bachelor of arts in Holocaust and genocide studies from Keene State College in Keene, New Hampshire, the first-in-the-nation undergraduate program dedicated to examining genocide beyond the context of the Holocaust. Through her studies, she made a concerted effort to keep Judaism and Jewish learning in her life while living in a college town with little Jewish presence, helping her realize her desire to work in a Jewish communal space.

In her free time, Drew enjoys spending time outside, attending Detroit sporting events, and trying new restaurants. ■

Creative spirit at the AARC Beit Sefer

By Rabbi Gabrielle Pescador

For the past several years, the children and madrichim (teen leaders) of the Ann Arbor Reconstructionist Congregation (AARC) Beit Sefer (religious school) have taken on a joyful responsibility: they write their own Purim spiel.

Yes — the entire thing.

Not just acting it. Not just rehearsing lines written by adults. But imagining, scripting, adapting, and producing their own interpretations of the Book of Esther. At first glance, it might look like a fun educational exercise. And it is. But it is also something deeper. In Reconstructionist Jewish education, we don't simply hand children inherited forms and ask them to replicate them. We invite them into the creative process of Judaism itself. We encourage them to see that Jewish tradition has always been a living, evolving conversation.

The Purim spiel — historically irreverent, satirical, and playful — is the perfect vehicle for this.

Set the Purim story in modern times
Played with contemporary political satire
Reimagined characters with surprising nuance
Written jokes only their generation could write

In doing so, they've learned something essential: Jewish ritual isn't static. It is something we participate in shaping. For example, the setting for this year's spiel started out underwater and ended up on the beach. It incorporated a running tongue-twister gag about a Shushan shoe store. It reimagined Haman's defeat not as a hanging but as a demotion from palace advisor to shoe shiner.

Our madrichim, too, become co-creators. They guide, encourage, and sometimes gently redirect, and resist the urge to control. The result is not always polished, but it is authentic. It belongs to the students.

In a time when so much of Jewish identity can feel inherited rather than chosen, giving our children authorship matters.

Purim itself is a holiday of reversals — hidden identities revealed, power structures flipped, laughter used as resistance. When our students write the spiel, they are not only retelling the story. They are enacting it. They experience what it feels like to speak boldly, creatively, even subversively within Jewish tradition.

Perhaps most importantly, they experience joy — and not as passive entertainment, but as active participation. When they stand on stage delivering lines they wrote themselves, they are not just performing Judaism. They are practicing it.

Beit Sefer director Shlomit Cohen notes, "I'd like to pay homage to Marcy Epstein, a teacher in the U-M Comprehensive Studies Program and a past director of the AARC religious school. As director, Marcy led the families in a workshop on writing the Purim Spiel. This is a tradition that continues to be strong and is passed on from student to student. As the current director, I wanted to honor this successful tradition, so I allowed the space for the students to write and run the show with a highly dedicated parent, David Speyer."

In both the Friday night service and the children's Purim Carnival, the children, dressed up and with noise makers in their hands, sang a quote from Pirkei Avot:

"Mi Shenichnas Adar Marbin Be'Simchah." Translation: "When the month of Adar enters, we are joyous." We had a very happy Purim indeed!

"Learning about our traditions, interpreting them in meaningful ways, and emphasizing joy and creativity are key to the AARC Beit Sefer experience," says Shlomit.

The AARC is a caring, inclusive and music and art-loving community of people who want to practice and study Judaism, or simply be around people who share a commitment to Judaism's values. The AARC's spiritual leader, Rav Gavrielle Pescador, is known for her warmth, her collaborative spirit, and her incredible voice and harp playing. You are invited to visit https://aarecon.org/ or email info@aarecon.org to learn more about the Ann Arbor Reconstructionist Congregation. To learn more about the AARC Beit Sefer, where K–7th graders enjoy interactive, creative group activities as well as individual attention, please visit https://aarecon.org/what-we-do/learning/religious-school/ ■

April Calendar

Always check websites or call for updates before planning to attend anything listed here.

Wednesday 1 Erev Pesach, First Seder
Yidish tish: (Virtual) (Yiddish Conversation & Reading Group): Zoom. About 45 minutes each of conversation and reading. Free and open to all those interested in Yiddish language, literature, and culture, no matter what level of proficiency. For more information email Elliot H. Gertel at egertel@umich.edu at least one day before scheduled meeting day every Wednesday (except major Jewish holidays). 2 p.m.

Thursday 2 Pesach Second Seder, Tonight Count Omer 1

Friday 3 Tonight Count Omer 2
Candle Lighting 7:45 p.m.

Saturday 4 Passover Torah readings, Tonight Count Omer 3
Havdallah 8:47 p.m.

Sunday 5 Tonight Count Omer 4

Monday 6 Tonight Count Omer 5
Jewish Book Series: *Milena and Margarete* by Gwen Strauss. JCC. 5 p.m.

Tuesday 7 Tonight Count Omer 6

Wednesday 8 Tonight Count Omer 7

Thursday 9 Tonight Count Omer 8

Friday 10 Tonight Count Omer 9
Candle Lighting 7:53 p.m.

Saturday 11, Shemini, Tonight Count Omer 10
Havdallah 8:55 p.m.

Sunday 12 Tonight Count Omer 11
Poetics of Resistance: Friends Meeting House. 3 – 5 p.m.
Alicia Jo Rabins at The Common Cup. JCLP. 6 p.m.

Monday 13 Tonight Count Omer 12
Jewish-Muslim Entanglements Symposium. Koessler Room Michigan League. 10 a.m. -7 p.m.
Pamela Rae Schuller at EMU. 7 p.m.

Tuesday 14 Tonight Count Omer 13 Yom HaShoah
Jewish-Muslim Entanglements Symposium. Koessler Room Michigan League. 10 a.m. -12 p.m.

Wednesday 15 Tonight Count Omer 14
Yidish tish: (Virtual) (Yiddish Conversation & Reading Group, see above): Zoom. 2 p.m.

Thursday 16 Tonight Count Omer 15

Friday 17, Rosh Chodesh Iyar, Tonight Count Omer 16
Candlelight 8:01 p.m.

Saturday 18, Tazia Metzora, Rosh Chodesh Iyar, Tonight Count Omer 17
Havdallah 9:04 p.m.

Sunday 19 Tonight Count Omer 18

Monday 20 Tonight Count Omer 19
Symposium on Judaism and Film, screening *Sabbath Queen*. Rackham Amphitheater. 6:30 p.m.

Tuesday 21 Tonight Count Omer 20
Symposium on Judaism and Film, screening *My One and Only*. Rackham Amphitheater. 6:30 p.m.

Wednesday 22 Tonight Count Omer 21 Yom HaZikaron

Thursday 23 Tonight Count Omer 22 Yom HaAtzmaut

Friday 24 Tonight Count Omer 23
Candlelight 8:09 p.m.

Saturday 25, Acharei-Kedoshim, Tonight Count Omer 24
Havdallah 9:13 p.m.

Sunday 26 Tonight Count Omer 25
Jewish Storytime at the AADL. Downtown Branch. Register on JLive. 10:30 a.m.
Klezmer, A Living Tradition. A community collaboration event. At Beth Israel. 3 p.m.

Monday 27 Tonight Count Omer 26

Tuesday 28 Tonight Count Omer 27
Borderland The Line Within Documentary. A fundraiser for MIRC. At TBE. 6:30 p.m.

Wednesday 29 Tonight Count Omer 28

Thursday 30 Tonight Count Omer 29

Valentine's Day in Prison

By Ken Wachsberger

Valentine's Day 2026: Emily was in South Carolina visiting her brother and sister-in-law. I texted her in the morning, because I knew she would still be asleep: "Happy Valentine's Day, my love. On my way to prison. Will call when I get back home."

I dress for decency

My game plan for the day was to visit a prisoner at GEO North Lake Processing Center, aka North Lake Immigrants Concentration Camp, in Baldwin, Michigan. I was prepared to follow all the rules so that I wouldn't be denied entry. I took my driver's license and a $20 donation out of my wallet so I could store my wallet with my keys in my knapsack. My pen and notebook I left there as well, comforted in the assurance that "3×5 note cards and bendy pens" would be available for note taking.

And I obeyed the unofficial dress code, which, we were warned, was being enforced:

> Pants with no holes/distressed material (jeans preferred but khakis, trousers, slacks are OK. no leggings, sweatpants or pajama-type bottoms)
> Closed-toed shoes and no Crocs
> Long-sleeve shirt or sweater with no pockets, no hoodies, no quarter zips
> If wearing a bra, no underwire

I wore jeans but with no holes in the knees, and my usual tennis shoes.

The restriction on bras with underwires fortunately was no problem for me. More of a challenge was the requirement to wear a long-sleeve shirt with no pockets. I wear short sleeves all year round and all my shirts have pockets to carry my glasses. My only option was my pullover wool turtle-neck sweater, which seemed too overdressed and warm for the event and the day's weather.

Then, lo and behold, I discovered a pocketless long-sleeve pullover on Emily's side of our closet. With confidence in my masculinity, I prepared to wear it as my alternative, until I received the following message: "I believe a short-sleeve shirt for a man will be allowed. A breast pocket is probably ok, too. It's sort of a 'decency police' dress code." I'm nothing if not decent. I went with short-sleeve button down over a T-shirt that said, "We were all immigrants."

On the road to Baldwin

Baldwin is located three and a half hours north of Ann Arbor. I drove up with friends Mary Anne and Amelia.

Mary Anne and I were going to meet another friend, Ramiro, and the three of us were going to make the visit.

Amelia brought with her eight cartons of Korans, 36 per box, a donation from an area mosque for the prisoners. We delivered them personally to the prison reverend as soon as we arrived. He was concerned to learn that they were hardbacks, which are strictly verboten as gifts because they may be hollowed out to hide contraband. However, he came up with a workaround: He would donate them to the prison library, which has many hardbacks, and prisoners can borrow them from there.

Mission accomplished, we went out front to join 100 other patriots who had shown up to show their support for the prisoners.

Food for the family

At 1 p.m., Mary Anne, Ramiro, and I went back to the prison for our visit. On our brief walk, a security guard approached us in her car. She made a point of telling us that she doesn't necessarily agree with what's happening but she needs food to feed her family. We're pretty sure this is the plight of many of the employees. It isn't uncommon for Trump/Miller concentration camps to be built in depressed communities that are forced to choose between principle and food. Baldwin is one of the most depressed areas in Michigan.

We had been given the name of one prisoner and instructions by a leader from No Detention Centers in Michigan, the leading statewide coalition working to abolish immigration concentration camps in Michigan. The prisoner was a Venezuelan asylum seeker who had been abducted in Chicago in October and brought to North Lake, where he has remained since then. His only family members in this country are an ex-wife and a daughter, who the ex-wife has kept from him. In other words, nobody.

I had so many questions, which I knew I would have to ask through Mary Anne and Ramiro because I'm not fluent in Spanish:

Why did you flee Venezuela?

What were you doing in Chicago and how were you caught?

What are conditions like in prison?

How is your health?

Do you have a routine? How is the food?

How can I contact your daughter?

Registering at the Prison

The reception area included two women behind the counter processing visitors, at one time or another about 30 visitors, and a handful of I guessed guards who were milling around not really doing anything. It appeared to be shift change time so some of the guards could have been waiting to leave. To the right side of the counter were two rows of chairs with 20 visitors, some of whom

were standing behind the chairs, all waiting to be called.

At the counter, we filled out the visitor form, which indicated who we were visiting, his "A" number, our driver's license numbers, our relation to the prisoner (we all wrote "friend"), and our addresses.

We each brought a $20 donation for our prisoner's commissary account. The bills all went into one envelope, which I signed after writing our prisoner's name and "A" number. Then one of the women directed us to watch as she sealed the envelope and dropped it into a secure box.

To join the waiting visitors on the right side of the counter, we had to pass through security on the left side. I put my coat and shoes in one basket and my glasses case in another and pushed them through the X-ray machine. I retrieved them after passing through the scanner and then joined the visitors.

Driving while Brown

While we were waiting to meet our designated prisoner, we talked with a young woman who was here to visit her boyfriend, another Venezuelan, who had been abducted in his car because he was driving while Brown. He had been imprisoned for six months but this was her first opportunity to visit him.

She tried futilely to hold back tears as she described his growing pessimism as he awaited his court date in December 2027! She was uplifted when we told her about Michigan Immigrant Rights Center (MIRC), which provides free legal help (but which is always in righteous need of donations).

We learned from one of the milling men, who described himself as a processor, that the prisoners come from all over, including Chicago, Grand Rapids, Detroit, and other cities. Many are from prisons. "It's all about money," he said. "Democrats, Republicans, ministers making over $200,000. I don't trust any of them. Governors from both parties call ICE, and ICE takes them to federal prisons so the state doesn't have to pay."

He says it is common for immigrants to be sent to camps and prisons far from their homes to reduce visits.

Waiting for what?

We waited an hour before being told to line up in front of the vestibule that led to what we guessed would be the meeting room. At last, we thought, we're on our way. We waited in line for another 10 minutes. And then our names were called. Here is what we were told: The prisoner we had travelled from Ann Arbor to visit "already had a visit today and inmates only get one visit a day."

What? That's it?

That was it.

My friend Rich and his wife, Nancy, who, like us, had driven up from Ann Arbor to show support for someone who they didn't know, got the same message.

What the hell?

Ramiro knew one of the women who had been picked up recently in Ypsilanti. "Can we visit her instead?" he asked. No, we couldn't because today was visitors' day in Delta cell, which was for the men. Visits are on a rotation basis. Bravo is the women's cell and visitation day there was Monday.

That was it. A three-and-a-half-hour ride to Baldwin, an hour wait in the reception area, and then a three-and-a-half-hour ride back home. Good company for sure, and we were on hand to join the 100 others outside the camp, but that was not our anticipated outcome.

Guests had other ways of being screwed also. A family of five drove in from Cincinnati only to learn that the maximum number of visitors at a time is four, so one of them had to remain in the waiting room.

Now we began to wonder, would our prisoner even receive the donation we had left for him? Will he even know a donation was given to him?

Happy Valentine's Day

Our treatment in Baldwin's Trump/Miller Concentration Camp is an extension of the dehumanizing treatment inmates receive. For one, we don't even know if indeed these two prisoners really had already received visitors. But even if they had, why are they only allowed one visit per visitors' day? The men's and women's cells are open for visitors each only one day a week. So, in effect, prisoners are allowed one visit a week. Visits are limited to 90 minutes.

How can members of the resistance — aka, immigrant supporters and family members — be given access to visitors' logs, or provided relevant information by prison staff, or allowed to make reservations, so duplicate assignments of prisoners to receive guests can be reduced and eliminated and out-of-town visitors can be assured their trips won't be in vain?

What other support groups besides No Detention Centers in Michigan are lining up volunteers to visit prisoners who otherwise would have nobody? How can they coordinate their efforts so prisoners aren't paired up with more than one group a day?

And how can we be assured our designated prisoner received our donation?

Happy Valentine's Day, everyone. ICE Out of Existence.. ■

Judaism and new film: Remix, reinvent, no repeat

By Caitlyn Gordon

This spring, the University of Michigan's Frankel Institute for Advanced Judaic Studies is hosting a Symposium on Judaism and Film. This global celebration of Jewish cinema is inspired by the new Oxford Handbook of Judaism and Film, edited by Olga Gershenson, Co-Head Fellow for the 2025–26 Frankel Institute "Jews and Media" theme year. The event reimagines Jewish film as a vibrant, multi-layered phenomenon, stretching beyond Hollywood and Europe to encompass India, Ethiopia, Turkey, Mexico, and beyond. The public is invited to join us for free screenings of *Sabbath Queen* (2024) and *My One and Only* (2025), at 6:30 p.m. on April 20 and 21, respectively, in the Rackham Amphitheater. RSVP at https://myumi.ch/79GqE.

We caught up with Gershenson to learn more about the two feature films and her larger vision for the symposium.

Frankel Institute: The upcoming symposium centers on your edited volume, *The Oxford Handbook of Judaism and Film*, which promises a bold rethinking of Jewish cinema. What are some new directions or unexpected geographies audiences can expect to see explored at the event?

Olga Gershenson: Both the book and symposium aim to move away from the idea that Jewish films are limited to Hollywood or Holocaust narratives. Audiences will encounter Jewish film cultures that are rarely discussed, and sometimes entirely unknown. We travel a global map: Jewish stars in early Indian cinema, contemporary Malayalam stories, Ethiopian narratives, Jewish actors in Egyptian films, Jewish-Muslim romances and "bromances" in Moroccan, British, and French movies, plus Jewish detectives in Soviet TV series. These aren't just curiosities — they fundamentally change our understanding of Jewish themes and their interactions with various national cinemas. We also highlight a variety of genres and styles — horror, Gothic, television, animation — as well as developments like Jewish film festivals worldwide, which became new secular synagogues. Finally, we examine Judaism as a religion, on-screen and behind the camera, including films produced by Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) filmmakers for their communities.

FI: The symposium features evening screenings of two strikingly different films: *Sabbath Queen* and *My One and Only*. What drew you to select works for the program, and how do they connect to the symposium's broader themes?

OG: I chose these two films for a few reasons. They sit at opposite ends of the Jewish cinematic spectrum — and yet they're in deep conversation with each other and with the book. *Sabbath Queen* is exuberant, public, and performative. It follows Rabbi Amichai Lau-Lavie as he reimagines Jewish ritual through queerness, drag, art, and radical politics. What drew me to it is how unapologetically it treats Judaism as something alive, flexible, and contested — a set of practices you can argue with, remix, and reinvent. Significantly, the film brings together two conversations rarely discussed in the same place: Judaism and gender expression, Judaism with its laws and traditions, and queerness, which subverts or reimagines them. Unsurprisingly, both religion and gender are also important themes in the *Handbook*.

My One and Only, by contrast, is quiet, eerie, and intimate. Set in a Haredi world, it asks whether a woman's sense that her husband has been "replaced" is psychological, spiritual, or something darker. This film reflects the Handbook's turn toward genre, especially horror, and its insistence that onscreen representations don't have to be realistic or historical to be taken seriously. Together, these films embody the symposium's core idea — that Judaism on screen is not one story, one tone, or one geography, but a rich field of possibilities.

FI: What kinds of conversations are you hoping to spark after these films, and what makes the post-screening dialogues different from typical Q&As?

OG: What I'm really hoping for after these films is not a "Did you like it?" conversation, but

a deeper, more generative interpretation. We hope for deeply informed, theme-driven conversations that invite the audience into serious and engaging thinking. After *Sabbath Queen*, scholars of queer Jewish ritual in film and media will dig into questions such as: What happens when ritual is updated to reflect new meanings? How does queerness reshape religious authority? What kinds of Jewish futures are being imagined here?

The discussion following My One and Only brings together scholars of Jewish horror, Haredi film, and Jewish religious cultures. Together, we can unpack how fear, belief, gender, and authority intersect in this film.

FI: Why do you think it's important to experience these films as part of a symposium, rather than just watching them on their own?

OG: Both films are new and only available at festivals or special events (like our symposium), so watching them on your own is not yet an option. Not to mention it's free! Watching these films at this symposium will allow audiences to connect with people who've spent years thinking about ritual, belief, gender, authority, queerness, and fear. Jewish culture values collective interpretation: watching, arguing, and questioning together. In a symposium setting, films become launching pads for conversation, disagreement, and discovery... ■

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APRIL EVENTS

Visit **lsa.umich.edu/judaic** for more information

Sabbath Queen (2024) Film Screening & Panel Discussion

Panelists: Nathan Abrams, Naftali Cohn, & Janis Plotkin

Monday, April 20 | 6:30 - 9:00 PM
Rackham Amphitheater
Follow Rabbi Amichai Lau-Lavie, dynastic heir of 38 generations of Orthodox rabbis, as he reinvents religion and ritual, and challenges supremacy.
RSVP: https://myumi.ch/79GqE

My One and Only (2025) Film Screening & Panel Discussion

Guest Speaker: Olga Gershenson, Gilad Halperin, Karla Malette, & Naomi Seidman

Tuesday, April 21 | 6:30 - 9:00 PM
Rackham Amphitheater
Weeks after giving birth to her first child, a young ultra-Orthodox woman arrives at her rabbi's wife's home claiming her husband has been replaced with an identical double. Does she need psychiatric care, or is her husband a demon?
RSVP: https://myumi.ch/79GqE

We are pleased to provide reasonable accommodations to enable full participation in this event. Please contact js-event-coord@umich.edu to request disability accommodations or with any questions/concerns.

Podcaster Aviva Klompas presents her views on antisemitism

By Amichay Findling, Israel and Overseas Manager at the Jewish Federation of greater Ann Arbor

On March 8, the Jewish Federation of Greater Ann Arbor hosted an insightful and timely conversation about antisemitism and how our community can respond to it.

The event featured renowned podcaster and public speaker Aviva Klompas. Klompas spoke about antisemitism, criticism of Israel, and the increasingly blurred line between them. Ms. Klompas' visit to Ann Arbor was a partnership between the American Jewish Committee (AJC), Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the Jewish Federation, and was made possible by Jewish Federations of North America. Among the over 30 attendees was Ann Arbor School Board Member Don Wilkerson.

Klompas presented a framework that helps distinguish legitimate criticism and protest from antisemitic targeting and intimidation. She was joined by Elyssa Schmier, Director of ADL Michigan, who interviewed her about the challenges faced in Ann Arbor, a university town where antisemitism increasingly emerges from the left.

Klompas offered three clear principles for distinguishing legitimate protest from antisemitic attacks. "Target the Israeli government or its policies — not Jews or Jewish institutions and businesses. Protesting in front of the Israeli embassy, the U.S. Department of State, or other government institutions is legitimate political speech," she said. "But protests, boycotts, or harassment directed at Jewish individuals, Jewish-owned businesses, synagogues, schools, or restaurants are not political criticism. They are antisemitism."

Second: "Do not treat Jews everywhere as responsible for Israel." Israel is the historic homeland of the Jewish people and the world's only Jewish state in nearly 2,000 years. Yet Jews around the world hold diverse views about Israeli policy, and Jews outside Israel are not responsible for decisions made by its government. Holding Jews collectively accountable for Israel is a classic antisemitic trope.

Third: "Do not promote violence or the destruction of Israel or Jews."

There is a fundamental difference between criticizing Israeli policy and calling for Israel's elimination or encouraging violence against Jews. Slogans such as "From the River to the Sea" or "Globalize the Intifada" fall into this category. They do not refer to any specific policy debate but instead invoke violence and the elimination of Israel.

One point raised during the conversation resonated deeply with the experience of people in Ann Arbor, where many members of the Jewish community work in academia.

In response to a question from Elyssa Schmier about microaggressions, professional exclusion, and the discomfort many Jewish academics experience around expressing their identity, Klompas offered a powerful observation:

"Normalizing exclusion of Jews is as antisemitic as painting a swastika on your door. One tactic antisemites use is pushing Jews out of polite society. Making you uncomfortable with your Jewish or Zionist identity, excluding you from professional opportunities, or socially isolating you — that is antisemitism."

In response to the question of "what should we do," Klompas said that the answer is not to stay quiet and hope the moment passes. Antisemites have historically targeted Jews regardless of how visible or quiet they are. Instead, she offered several important steps for strengthening our community from within and engaging with the broader society.

First, she emphasized the need to strengthen Jewish education. It is important to "raise a generation of Jews who are knowledgeable, confident, and secure in their identity." Educated Jews are far less likely to be intimidated or pushed aside.

Secondly, she suggested making Israel part of regular conversation. Research consistently shows that balanced Israel education — one that acknowledges moral, political, and historical complexity — strengthens long-term engagement with Israel and with Jewish identity.

Thirdly, she emphasized the importance of engagement outside the Jewish community. It is important to speak with different segments of society in ways that resonate with them and explain how hatred harms those specific segments of society with which you engage. Hatred is toxic; it never stops with only the Jews.

Klompas also cautioned against several common mistakes people make in efforts to counteract antisemitism.

Firstly, she said that Jews should not portray themselves as victims. While Jews are a minority group, the community is not powerless and should not represent itself as such.

Secondly, she suggested avoiding "virtue signaling" about Jewish achievements. Reminding people how many Nobel Prize winners are Jewish or how Jews have contributed to world civilization rarely persuades anyone and often alienates audiences.

Finally, she said that when discussing antisemitism, it is often more effective to speak about how hatred damages the person you are speaking with, rather than focusing only on how it harms Jews.

The conversation also concluded with two reasons for cautious optimism:

The first comes from the Middle East itself. Since October 7, several countries in the region have strengthened their relationships with Israel and with Jewish communities around the world. While some Western leaders attempt to gain political advantage by criticizing Israel while failing to confront antisemitism at home, regional cooperation with Israel continues to grow. Israel is increasingly recognized as a strategic partner by moderate Sunni countries, and even Syria's new leadership has signaled openness toward Jewish engagement. The Jewish Federation's JCRC Director Rabbi Asher Lopatin has already visited Syria several times as part of these emerging connections.

The second reason for optimism is the seriousness with which the current U.S. administration is addressing antisemitism. While antisemitism is rising across much of the Western world — including Britain, Canada, France, and Australia — the United States has taken significant steps to counter it. Security authorities are actively monitoring threats, and the large antisemitic encampments that once dominated campuses have largely disappeared. While challenges remain, Jewish communities in the United States continue to live in far greater safety than in many other parts of the world.

Following a brief Q&A session, the evening concluded with a sense of both clarity and resolve. For more information about Israel programs, contact Amichay Findling (amichay@jewishannarbor.org).■

Democrats and Republicans of Washtenaw County can still engage

By Jewish Federation Staff

More than 60 community members gathered at Beth Israel Congregation on February 18 for a special evening of civic engagement, hosted by the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Ann Arbor (JCRC) and co-sponsored by A More Perfect Nation: The Jewish Partnership for Democracy.

The event offered attendees an opportunity to learn how they can become more involved in public life — whether by participating in local Democratic or Republican party organizations, serving on city or county commissions, or engaging with the many nonprofit organizations throughout the Greater Ann Arbor area.

Caption: Nomi Joyrich, of Jews for a Secular Democracy, speaking to Republican leader Stuart Foster.

The evening stood out for its spirit of collaboration and shared purpose. Regardless of political affiliation, participants were united in their belief that active civic engagement is essential to the health of the community. Throughout the program, local political leaders from across the political spectrum engaged in thoughtful and friendly conversation. A particularly memorable moment came when Stuart Foster spoke warmly about his admiration for Debbie Dingell and her late husband, John Dingell. Speaking to Rep. Dingell shortly after she addressed the audience, Stuart said, "you and your husband brought up memories of a bygone era, when people who disagreed could still be good friends."

The evening underscored the vital role civic participation plays in strengthening democratic institutions at the local, state, and national levels. Rabbi Asher Lopatin, the Community Relations Director at the Jewish Federation, reflected that "This evening showed that the Jewish community of Washtenaw County is interested in helping the broader community by investing their time and efforts in civic engagement on all levels." It also highlighted the value of bringing people together across political differences to foster respectful dialogue and shared commitment to community.

The JCRC, a part of the Jewish Federation of Greater Ann Arbor, remains committed to encouraging civic engagement and constructive conversation around the issues facing the region and the country. Organizers hope the Washtenaw County community can serve as a model for how people with differing perspectives can engage respectfully — upholding their values while cultivating openness, understanding, and meaningful dialogue. For more information about the JCRC, contact Rabbi Asher Lopatin (asher@jewishannarbor.org). ■

Engaging the Israeli Community

By Diana Ingberg

In advance and recognition of Women's History Month, a group of Israeli women gathered on February 24 in Ann Arbor for an evening of aromatherapy, connection, and community building. Coordinated by the Jewish Federation of Greater Ann Arbor, the aromatherapy presentation was led by Aviv Touitou, a certified aromatherapist and social worker, who combines professional expertise with a great commitment to community well-being.

The event brought together women from different stages of life and different points in their journeys. Some were new members of the community, who recently arrived in Ann Arbor for university-related assignments. Others were long-time residents — the "vatikim." And some have been in the community for a few years, gradually putting down roots and proudly calling Ann Arbor and its Jewish community their home. There was even a visitor from West Bloomfield, who was excited for the opportunity to meet fellow Israeli women and enjoy stimulating conversation in Hebrew.

This was more than an aromatherapy workshop. It was a chance to honor women's stories and contributions. The event was the first in a series of Jewish Federation engagements providing members of the local Israeli community meaningful opportunities to strengthen connections and celebrate shared heritage. For more information about upcoming programs for the Israeli community, visit jlive.app or contact Diana Ingberg (diana@jewishannarbor.org). ■

Good morning, Baltimore!

By Karla Goldman and Morgan Hesse

Each year, University of Michigan's Jewish Communal Leadership Program (JCLP) goes on a trip as a full cohort to immerse themselves in a Jewish community, expand their knowledge of Jewish history, and strengthen cohort bonds. This year, JCLP's students, with support from the Frankel Center for Judaic Studies, were honored to travel to Baltimore as Travel Fellows of the Frankel Center for Judaic Studies. From February 4 through February 8, the JCLP group was warmly hosted by a broad array of Baltimore Jewish leaders and communities.

This trip was deeply engaging and left the students thinking about the multitude of ways in which they can embody Jewish values as leaders in their future communities.

Two JCLP alumni who live in Baltimore assisted with the trip planning and were also around to welcome the students to Baltimore. Ali Duhan ('19) is the annual campaign director for Baltimore's Jewish federation, known as "The Associated," and Nora Greenstein Jacober ('20) is a director at Third Plateau, a philanthropy consulting firm. Seeing JCLP alumni as successful leaders within their Jewish community was inspiring for the current students and affirming of the work they are each individually putting in as Master's students in social work.

The first full day in Baltimore took place at The Associated offices in Pikesville with a lunchtime excursion to Seven Mile Market, the huge kosher supermarket in the neighborhood. Ali Duhan had assisted in scheduling meetings with a steady stream of leaders from an array of different Jewish organizations and foundations. This gave students a wide perspective of not only Jewish life in Baltimore, but also of what communal leadership and fundraising efforts look like in the city.

Susanna Garfein, Executive Director of Na'aleh, shared how her agency focuses on supporting laypeople in Jewish communal space with Jewish learning. Larry Ziffer, CEO of the Charles Crane Family Foundation, talked about the vibrancy of Baltimore's Orthodox community. Jon Hornstein, Managing Director of National Grantmaking for the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, discussed the importance of supporting low-income Jewish families and the role of foundations in Jewish communal work. Andrew Cushnir, President and CEO of The Associated; Paul Lurie, CEO of the JCC of Greater Baltimore; and Jacki Post Ashkin, Director of Community Connections for Jewish Community Services, all provided a comprehensive overview of what opportunities and challenges look like in Jewish Baltimore and how they cater their services to Jewish people of different denominations. They discussed the ways in which COVID impacted their abilities to enact change at a community level, how each of their organizations has worked to eliminate barriers to Jewish connection, and the importance of connecting with young Jewish adults.

The JCLP students were deeply moved by their conversation with Lauren Shaivitz, Executive Director of CHANA, an organization serving those who have experienced interpersonal violence, domestic violence, sexual assault, or other kinds of abuse and trauma, by providing a Jewish community response to meet their needs. JCLP students left the day thinking critically about the populations they may want to support in their future work. Overall, the JCLP's visit to The Associated offered the students a chance to discuss real communal challenges with professionals doing the work — as opposed to debating theoretical issues among themselves.

On Friday morning, JCLP was generously welcomed by Rabbi Jessy Dressin to Baltimore's Third Space at its historic synagogue home for a wide-ranging breakfast conversation that included Rabbi Elissa Sachs-Kohen, Rabbi Andy Gordon, and Ashley Pressman, Senior Program Director at Adamah. With these leaders, the students learned about unique Baltimore programs like Erev Rosh Hashanah Under The Stars, which attracts 3,000 worshippers, and a latke food truck event that brought in 500 Hanukkah celebrants. Discussion focused on the unique challenges posed for less observant Jews in a community with such a large Orthodox population and the importance of creating access, experiences, and community homes for those with less traditional identities.

A docent-led tour at the Jewish Museum of Maryland introduced the students to the historic Lloyd Street Synagogue (1845) and B'nai Israel Synagogue (1876) buildings and two current exhibits: "Modernisms" focused on post-war Baltimore Jewish artists and "Upon Thy Gates" offered a stunning collection of mezuzot from around the world, which allowed students to consider a variety of aesthetics and Jewish traditions of making home. Lunch at Baltimore's multigenerational-family-run Attman's Deli offered a welcoming dive into the Jewish culinary traditions of Baltimore — and an enthusiastic history of the family and Baltimore's Corned Beef Row.

After lunch, the JCLP group visited Johns Hopkins Hillel where they were welcomed by Executive Director Monica Davis, Executive Director, and Rabbi Debbie Pine, one of Hillel's Campus Support Directors. The leaders talked about their efforts to meet the needs of this particular community, particularly since October 7, 2023 — and the importance of providing a daily safe space to congregate, work, and learn together. That evening, the JCLP attended Friday night Shabbat service at Baltimore Hebrew Congregation, followed by a short historic tour of the synagogue with Rabbi Andrew Busch, who explained how suburbanization had reshaped Baltimore's Jewish community.

After services, the group returned to their Airbnb and cooked a wonderful Shabbat dinner together, singing songs from their days at Jewish summer camps before sharing delicious challot picked up on their earlier venture to 7 Mile Market. The students recited the blessings, held a gratitude circle where they reflected on the trip and their JCLP experiences, and connected with laughter and love as they passed food around the table. This dinner was a beautiful encapsulation of the values of the JCLP — collectiveness, sharing traditions, and deepening the sense of community.

On Saturday morning, the JCLP attended a Shabbat service at Beth Am Synagogue, a vibrant urban congregation in a historic synagogue where they were graciously welcomed by Rabbi Tyler Dratch and congregant Barry Kessler. Following the service, JCLP students got to mingle with the congregants over kiddush lunch, knowledgeably discussing communal issues after absorbing so much understanding of Jewish Baltimore. After lunch, JCLP was taken on a walking tour by Dr. Eric Goldstein and Dr. Deborah Weiner, authors of On Middle Ground: A History of the Jews of Baltimore. Despite the severe wind chill, Dr. Goldstein and Dr. Weiner actualized the history students had read about and heard about on the trip, allowing them to physically orient themselves in Baltimore and experience some of its stunning architecture.

Graduating JCLP students discovered this unique artwork by Liana Finck,, featuring Alicia Jo Rabins, at the Third Space synagogue in Baltimore. Rabins will be performing in Ann Arbor as a guest of JCLP on April 12 — find event details at https://myumi.ch/E8RQ2.

The long weekend in Baltimore allowed the JCLP students to truly immerse themselves in a community distinctly different from their own in Ann Arbor. It also gave them a chance to reflect on the excitement of learning together, the strong Jewish community they have built within JCLP, and how important it is to continue using their voices to enact positive change in the world. With the second-year students considering where they will find themselves after graduation, this trip provided reassurance that there is a place for each of them within Jewish communal work, as well as excitement about the multitude of possibilities for such work.

In that spirit of learning and connection, the Jewish Communal Leadership Program invites community members to join an upcoming community event planned by second-year students — a concert of songs that reimagine women of the Bible with musician and author Alicia Jo Rabins on April 12, from 6–8 p.m. at The Common Cup. The evening promises meaningful music, creative reflection, free coffee and espresso drinks, and a chance to further strengthen ties within Ann Arbor. All are welcome, please RSVP at https://myumi.ch/E8RQ2.■

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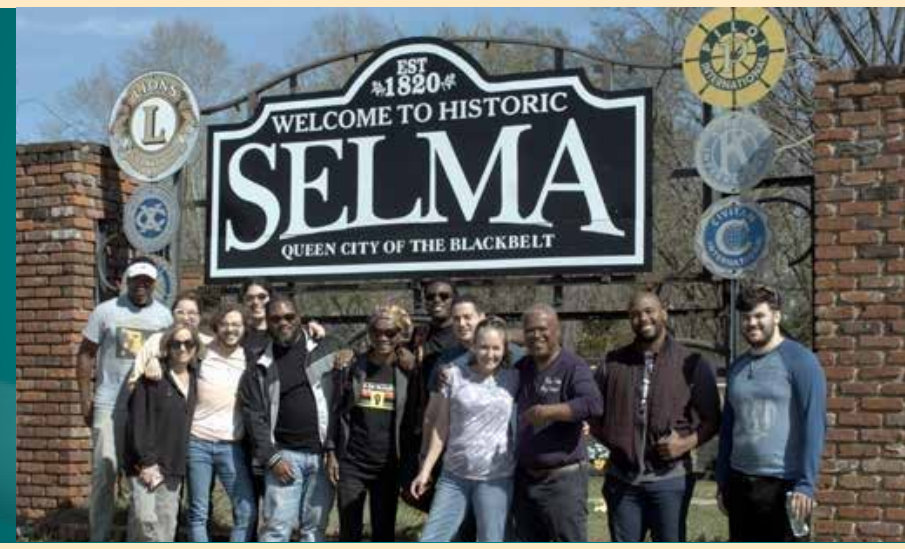

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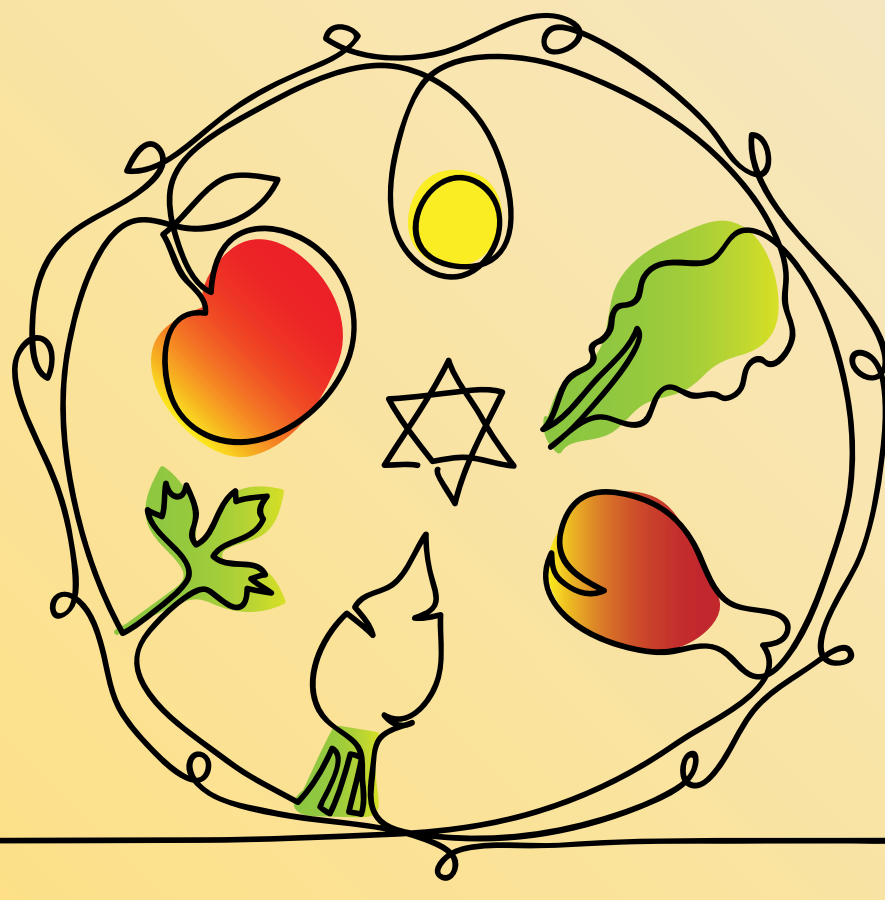

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Poetics of Resistance during National Poetry Month

By Stephanie Kraver

Poetry demands attention, introduces new perspectives, and grapples with uncomfortable truths. April is National Poetry Month, which honors the power of poetry to inspire change and recognizes its significance in American history and culture. On Sunday, April 12, 3–5 p.m., poets Sara Abou Rashed, who is Palestinian American and Muslim, and Isaac Pickell, who is African American and Jewish, will come together for an afternoon of Poetics of Resistance at Friends Meeting House of Ann Arbor, 1402 Hill Street.

The daughter and granddaughter of Palestinian refugees, Abou Rashed was born and raised in Syria. She received an MFA in Creative Writing from the Helen Zell Writers' Program at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, and is currently pursuing her PhD at The Ohio State University. Abou Rashed's writing traces her family's displacement from Haifa and interrogates identity, belonging, exile, and returning home. She connects history to the present, past to future, and violence to intimate everyday moments of exiled life.

Abou Rashed has written extensively on being a Palestinian in the diaspora, and more recently on the unprecedented tragedy of Gaza, using language to advocate for an end to the occupation and human rights violations, and to mourn the loss of shared humanity. Her poems honor the lives and resilience of the Palestinian people, as well as the power of lineage and memory preservation. She is the writer and performer of the one-woman show A Map of Myself. Her first collection, Theories of Return, will be out this April from Diode Editions.

Born and raised in Ann Arbor, Pickell is an African American Jewish poet, PhD candidate, and adjunct instructor working in Detroit. His work is concerned with liberation, possibility, and what poetry can do beyond witness. He is the author of The Smallest Mistake We Call Human (Black Lawrence Press, 2026) and It's not over once you figure it out (Black Ocean, 2023), as well as chapbooks from Black Lawrence Press and Dead Mall Press.

From their respective voices, Pickell and Abou Rashed will speak to the occupation and the devastation of war, captivity, and violence. In their work, too, is a vision for a different future. Together, they invite us to consider other ways of being, and to acknowledge every day as an act of resistance.

Following the readings, University of Michigan Professor Bryan K. Roby will moderate a discussion with the poets and audience Q&A. Poetics of Resistance is co-sponsored by Chesed Havurah, Detroit Jews for Justice, and Poet Tree Town. Write to poeticsofresistancea2@gmail.com for additional information. ■

Sara Abou Rashed

A Theory:

DIASPORA

At our dining table,
frozen memories thaw for all of us
to share. Hands tugging at a moon of pita bread. I'm everyone who ever lived
to make me. A nest, woven and unwoven in the family tree. Birds travel
in flocks not knowing what we make of them. Perhaps
they have more tender words
for *it*.

Isaac Pickell

Direct and unavoidable consequences

People do not like living in cages and
will do anything they can to break free:

sometimes this will not be pretty and
other times it will be so beautiful you weep.

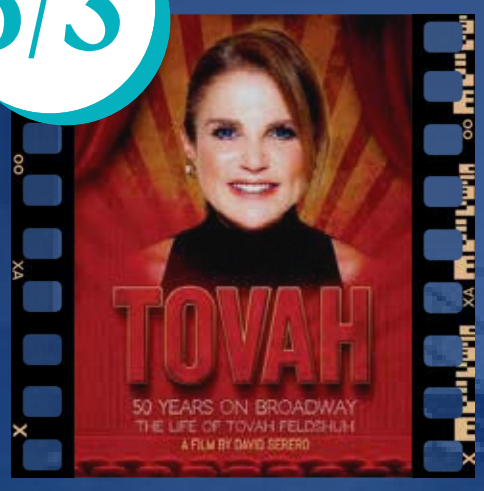
The direct and unavoidable consequence
of putting people in cages is they grow

stems no matter how
many times you cut them down.

2026 ANN ARBOR

Sunday, May 3 -

5/3



TOVAH
1:30 PM
The State Theater

5/3

The Pianist's Choice
6:30 PM
The State Theater

5/7

The Last Spy
6:30 PM
The State Theater

5/11

Girls Like Us
6:30 PM
The State Theater

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Wednesday May 13

5/4

Sapiro v. Ford
6:30 PM
The State Theater

5/6

The Sea
6:30 PM
The State Theater

5/12

Stay Forte
6:30 PM
The State Theater

5/13

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7:00 PM
Morris Lawrence Building, Towsley Auditorium

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Time for Thai

By Lonnie Sussman

January and February was a long time ago and I'm happy to be home after a very long trip to Southeast Asia. It was beautiful, full of history, culture, adventure, and several World Heritage Sights.

A highlight for me and many of the other women on the trip was the visit to an elephant sanctuary. This sanctuary was one of the ethical places caring for elephants and allowing people to interact with them. What an honor to spend time there and learn more about the need to protect wildlife, forests, and the environment.

Another highlight was a cooking class we had in Chiang Mai at an organic farm. Our teacher was Garnet and she was fantastic. We made six or seven dishes, but I'm only including one of the recipes here. Many had ingredients that may not be easy to find in Michigan. I confess, I liked the northern Thai food more than the southern styles. My experience of the food was also limited to vegetarian dishes even though there are many noodle and rice dishes. All the vegetarian dishes included tofu, of course.

Northern Thai Pad Thai

Grandma's Cooking School, Chiang Mai

1 serving and you can do the math for more
- 200 grams rice noodles (a little less than a half lb). Add water to soak until the noodles are tender, then drain well.
- 50 grams of chicken breast or thigh, or meat of your choice, about 1/3 cup. Use tofu for vegetarian Pad Thai.
- 1 shallot or 1 garlic, thinly sliced
- 1 egg
- Bean sprouts (use however much you want)
- Shredded carrots (again, use what you want)
- Crushed peanuts
- Slice of lime
- Canola or other oil for coating the frying pan

The Sauce
- 1tsp sugar (palm sugar if you can find it)
- 1 tbs soy sauce or mushroom sauce if you can find that
- 2 tbs tamarind sauce
- Chili powder to your taste

Prepare the sauce in a mixing bowl and mix until well all the ingredients are well dissolved. Use a wok or a frying pan and add the oil. Then add the shallot and/or garlic for a few minutes or until they are fragrant. Next, mix in an egg. Push the mix to one side of the pan and add the noodles and sauce to the other side and then mix everything together. Finally, add in the bean sprouts and carrots and stir everything together. Serve with ground peanuts and a slice of fresh lime. ■

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for questions to contact jewish.studies@emich.edu

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Restaurant Review

Noshing on Noodles at Lan City

By Candace Bulkley and Trina Fuller

Candace and Trina became friends in the Temple Beth Emeth adult b-mitzvah class that graduated in 2022. They will be honing their palates, visiting, and writing about a variety of independent, locally owned Washtenaw County restaurants, catering to a variety of dietary preferences.

As this issue arrives at your door, the Jewish community worldwide will be celebrating Passover, our holiday of redemption. While you are spreading salty butter on yet another square of matzah, some of you may be considering your first post-holiday meal, known in some circles as "chametz fest." May we suggest gathering with your family and friends at Lan City for some delicious handmade noodles? It's a great place to get together one more time, to share, try something new, and eat chametz with abandon!

Prior to the holiday, we had the good fortune to dine with the Women of Temple Beth Emeth's Noon Nosh group at their monthly outing. One bonus of that, besides the excellent company, was being able to justify the ordering of a wide variety of dishes for everyone to try. We started with some standards — scallion pancakes, which are the best we have tasted in the Ann Arbor area. Their crispy exterior and tender scallion studded interior hit all of the right notes when dipped into the slightly sweet/salty dipping sauce. And they're vegan. The fried vegetable dumplings arrived piping hot. The plump house-made dumpling wrappers were filled with vegetables, had a toothsome texture, and were quickly devoured. On the more adventurous side, we decided to try the cold sesame peanut noodles featured on the daily specials card. A generous portion of golden hand-pulled egg noodles was topped with a thick peanut sauce, chopped scallions, and toasted sesame seeds. The addictive smashed cucumbers with garlic were flavor-forward standouts. Rounding out our starters were the subtly sweet red bean paste-filled fried sesame balls, and the delicate steamed tofu with chopped pepper.

As the name implies, Lan City is known for their noodles which are made fresh to order. Diners can watch the noodle maker rolling, stretching and cutting the dough through a window in the dining room. There are two kinds of fresh noodles — knife peeled and hand stretched. The knife peeled are denser and chewier. The hand stretched seemingly go on forever. In one serving, there is typically one very long noodle. Noodle slurping is perfectly acceptable and understandable, but the servers will supply scissors if requested.

After the bevy of appetizers, many of us felt like we could call it a day and go home full, but the list of noodle dishes compelled us to order more. We sampled the beef noodle soup, which had a gentle flavored broth with tender beef slices and bok choy. It was a perfect meal for a stormy day. The Vegetable Lo Mein had a slight and delightful smoky-charred flavor from the wok, and the

fresh vegetables were cooked to a perfect tender crisp. The incredible noodles — long as a country mile — had to be cut with scissors and were both delicious and fun to eat! Our dining companions ordered a wide variety of noodle dishes with colorful vegetables, tofu and meats — more food than we could have possibly eaten and written about here. Our leftovers easily made two additional meals at home.

The restaurant is owned by Malcolm Gin and his family, who have previous restaurant experience in New York City and the Detroit area. Lan City will introduce you to the wide world of noodle dishes of Asia. Noodle making is a labor-intensive process. Our community is lucky to have a locally-owned family business keeping tradition alive and making fresh noodles every day. Leave the cooking and cleaning up to someone else and go to see the process for yourself and bring your loved ones along on the journey. We dined at the original location on Washtenaw Ave. in Ypsilanti. There is a second location on S. University in Ann Arbor that offers quick service and is more geared toward the student crowd. ■

Lan City Hand Pulled Noodles

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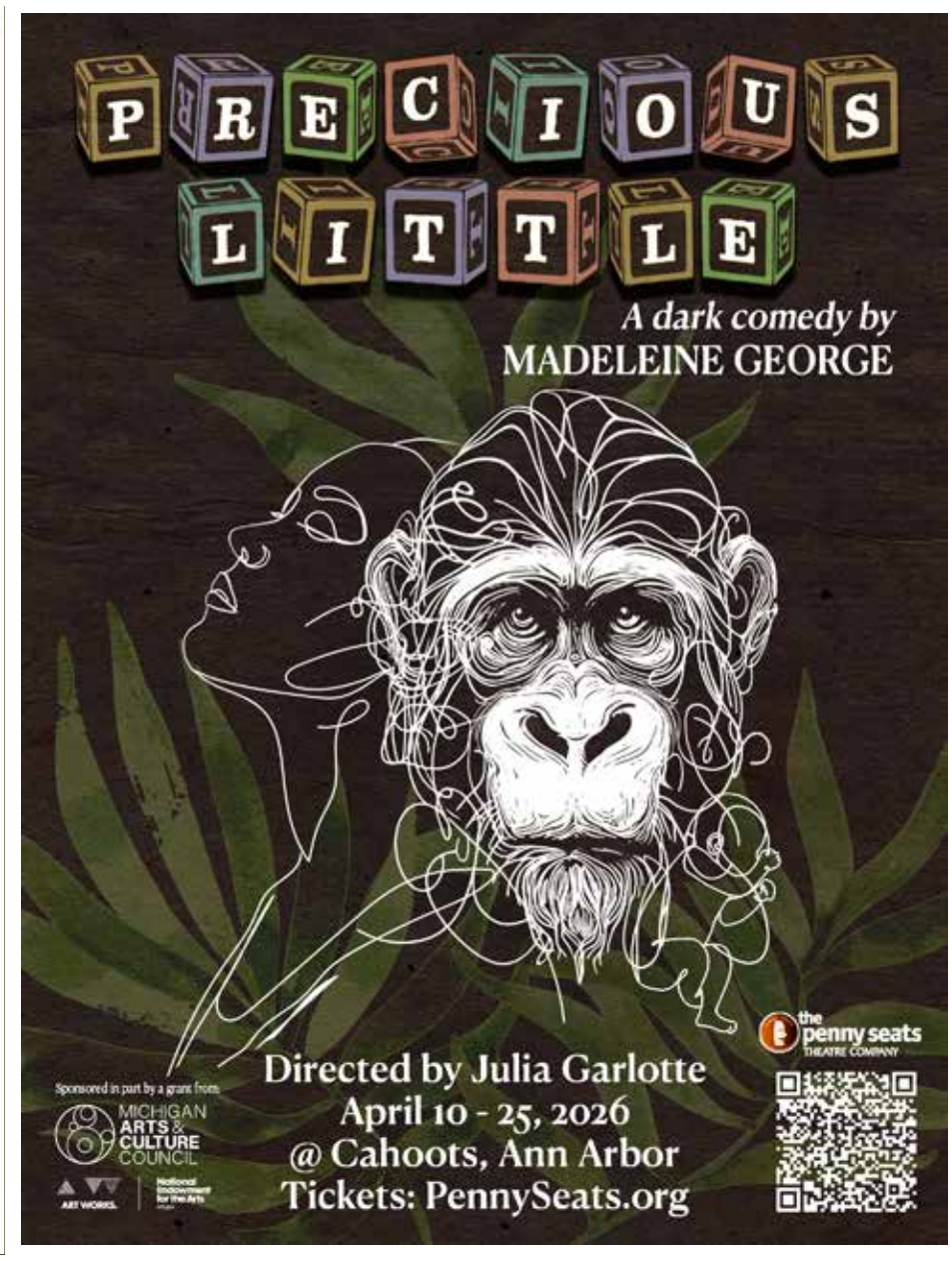


From Jerusalem to Egypt to Rome to Amsterdam to Michigan: My Purim wartime Exodus

By Neil Alexander

I just returned from an Israel experience unlike any other, at least for me. I went to visit and support my daughter Miriam in Jerusalem, visit family and good friends, and explore foods, as well as outdoor and cultural activities, both familiar and new. Although I was aware before the sirens started that war was imminent, I did not want to miss my chance to spend one-on-one time with Miriam in her world, as a gift to myself for reaching age 70.

Thursday 2/26:

I arrived in Israel on in the afternoon and took the amazing, new (to me), and efficient Rakevet (train) Ysrael from the airport to Jerusalem: none of the usual car pkakim (traffic jams).

I met Miriam at her apartment in Rehavia, entered my Airbnb two blocks away, and then went to get the typical presents on Ben Yehudah Street and the Mahane Yehudah shuk for all those at home. Dinner was a Doner kebab, my first kosher one; the mostly carry-out AKA was mobbed. I bought huge clementines the size of my fist and ripe strawberries nearly that size, both unbelievably sweet. I then went to my usual organic bakery (Natural Choice) right off the shuk and got my favorite "pereg" (poppy seed) treats and what may be the world's biggest hamentash (photo_1). Laden with packages, we took the bus back.

Friday 2/27:

Joined by two of her friends. Miriam and I drove to Tel Sokha/Givat HaTurmosim, 30 minutes west of Jerusalem, and joined the crowds admiring the spring flowers: calaniyot (red anemone), rakefet (pink cyclamen), and the masses of turmos heharim (blue lupine, photo 2). Lunch was at a "humusiyah" with my favorite ful (fava) beans in Abu Ghosh. Dinner was with a family whose twins were friends with our girls during our Jerusalem sabbatical in 2001–2002. Those twins now have five little people of their

own; each got U Michigan swag (teddy bears dressed with a UM shirt, photo 3). We then went to a potluck where many in Miriam's community gathered. I connected with second generation folk from my distant past in Minneapolis and recent past in Ann Arbor. Rak b'yisrael (only in Israel)!

Miriam's work

Miriam is presently the Resource Development & Operations Director at Achvat Amim ("Solidarity of Nations"), a movement building platform and educational initiative committed to social justice. I was struck by Miriam's friends that I met from a like-minded activist community, well-educated, highly accomplished, and very supportive of each other. Some were journalist/editors of magazines, such as +972 and Jewish Currents; they have a clearly articulated alternative voice.

Saturday 2/28:

I checked out the shelter (miklat) and got the alert app from Miriam. Within an hour, I was alerted by a blaring warning alert on my phone. A second alert (photo 4), simultaneous with sirens, followed, directing me to get to the miklat in 90 seconds. I ran down a long block and 24 (slippery rock) stairs to get into a concrete shelter with a metal blast door. Soon after the sirens stopped, an iron dome missile interceptor rocket (which seemed virtually overhead) whizzed by me followed by a boom. I knew I had to get to the shelter to be protected from falling metal debris. I can't say I made it each time in 90 sec and a few times I just stayed in the apartment and waited. Talk to those who have been through many of these; some don't even bother getting out of bed!

The miklat

Life in the miklat is as you might expect, most eyes glued to phones, an occasional comment about what was happening in real time, one person with annoying comments, and a quiet, gloomy mood. Yet all were supportive of each other. While I prided myself the first time that I could stand for long periods, with repeated miklat stays, I appreciated the offer of somewhere to sit. Up to 20 attended this apartment basement miklat; people were close to each other, but not uncomfortably. One older couple served double duty, the woman often made sage comments and the man dealt with door handle issues.

All of my plans for Saturday were thwarted, visiting my cousins (with more UM swag),) and going to my first Ladino musical at HaBimah in Tel Aviv.

By Saturday afternoon, I hung out with Miriam to be closer to a miklat. There were periods of quiet and we had a nice neighborhood walk. She cooked a fantastic dinner, interrupted by new alerts and running to her miklat. During one alert, after shabbat, someone came down to the miklat with the full Havdalah set. I was so moved by the numbers of those who loudly participated in the Hebrew refrains, even the apparently non-religious. I later congratulated the leader as this was my first miklat Havdalah. He said it was his first too!

Many family, friends, and co-workers texted, concerned for my welfare. My Israeli VA Geriatrics fellow texted I was now getting the real Israel experience!

I slept Saturday night fully clothed and made it to the miklat on time for the two missile alerts.

Sunday 3/1:

Sunday's plans were thwarted as well, an educational tour of a Palestinian village, and an evening of Israeli folk dancing.

I began to wonder whether my flight would leave on Tuesday morning 3/3, with Israel airspace closed. Then came the successive messages. The flight on Tuesday canceled but rescheduled to Thursday 3/5, and then Thursday was canceled. I had a Delta-El Al codeshare that I thought would prioritize me but then El Al commented in an email that apparently I did not need to fly with them. No new reservations for El Al until 3/21. Ben Gurion airport had not reopened, and the message online was to prioritize repatriation of Israelis, if and when the airport would be reopened. Both Israel's and Jordan's air spaces were closed. I spent hours with Delta online and was eventually booked to fly out on Saturday 3/7 on Delta. Really? My only real option was going through Egypt. Flights from Sharm el Sheikh would go through Cairo and would be 30–40 hours of uninterrupted travel.

Then, one of Miriam's friends suggested that I join her by going through Taba, in Egypt, on an Arkia (Israeli airline) flight, directly to Europe. When logging into the Arkia site (only in Hebrew), it looked like there were no available flights, but after repeated attempts Miriam managed to find a flight for me on Tuesday March 3. Through her contacts, Miriam arranged a driver to get me to Eilat, taking her friend as well.

Monday 3/2:

We left Jerusalem Monday morning, arriving in Eilat 3+ hours later, and Miriam's friend, with her skilled Arabic, walked with me across the border into Taba (photo 5). In the Taba immigration area, I was struck by the multiple stations, each seeming to overlap in their responsibility, many requiring cash with a resultant receipt, and one requesting "tips, tips." Prices were not in Egyptian currency, but in American dollars although I heard Israeli shekels were also accepted. I stayed overnight at the enormous grounds of the Movenpick hotel/resort in Taba. Few guests were there. A few noises in the night made me jump — was that a jet, an explosion?

Tuesday 3/3:

It was a 40-minute bumpy taxi ride

through tall rock canyons to the Taba airport (photo 6) in nearby Nuweiba. The airport consisted of one tall building with what seemed to be one runway, with a number of jets parked whose airline names I did not recognize. Following a two-plus-hour chaotic check in process, with, again, overlapping responsibilities and handwritten documents (such as the boarding pass), I was assured that the long line wouldn't matter, that the plane was late and that they wouldn't leave us there. Then to the shouts of "Roma", we were hustled to drop luggage and go through customs, only to wait for another hour to board. We boarded a Neos airline plane with an Italian crew. Landing in Rome, I finally felt relieved that I would fly to Amsterdam and then finally home on Wednesday.

Gratitude:

I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to those who helped me on my way. To the owner of the Airbnb who agreed to let me stay longer if I needed to. Even though this was her residence, she was willing to find housing elsewhere for herself if necessary. To those staff, friends, and family, and especially my wife, who reached out to me — thanks for thinking about my safety, particularly with the terrible images shown on national news every day. That was not exactly my experience. To Miriam's friend, without whose referral of the flight possibility, my return would have been much more difficult. And then there was her help in crossing the border. And to Miriam — I was so proud to follow her skillful and confident lead, and let me reap the benefits. I was so moved by her willingness to struggle through this present situation and prioritize protecting me from harm.

In sum, although my story happened over Purim, it is also a Pesach story; this time where Egypt helped let people in and helped people get out!. ■

Building relationships, Michigan to Jerusalem

An interview with Miriam Alexander

When Neil Alexander sent in his harrowing story of visiting his daughter Miriam as the US-Israel-Iran was began, I wanted to hear more of Miriam's story. I interviewed her via email March 10–12. Miriam Alexander, a graduate of the Ann Arbor Hebrew Day School, holds an MA in Jewish Studies from Hebrew University and a BA in Screen Arts & Cultures from the University of Michigan. She is the Development Director of Achvat Amim, Solidarity of Nations — a movement-building platform that provides frameworks and programming for adults to engage in meaningful partnerships with Palestinians and Israelis in the movement for self-determination

Human Rights, and Torat Tzedek have

Miriam Alexander

for all.

WJN: Miriam, tell us a little about growing up in Ann Arbor.

Miriam: Growing up in Ann Arbor, I was fortunate to live in an academic city that is both diverse and home to such a vibrant and thoughtful Jewish community. It was only after meeting people from all over the world while living in Brooklyn and Jerusalem that I realized how unique Ann Arbor is, and how much it shaped my values of open dialogue and a responsibility to work toward a better and more just world, which I carry with me today.

WJN: What about growing up in Ann Arbor prepared you for moving to Israel? I know some of Achvat Amim's partners such as Combatants for Peace, Rabbis for had representatives speak in Michigan for many years. Did you hear them when you were still in Michigan?

Miriam: Ann Arbor's culture of civic participation shaped my path significantly. Ann Arbor instilled my sense that being Jewish isn't just about identity, but about asking ethical questions and showing up in intentional ways. I actually didn't know about these organizations while I was still living in Ann Arbor. It was only after moving to Brooklyn, then Jerusalem, and becoming involved in organizing and solidarity work here in Jerusalem that I began connecting with people from groups like Combatants for Peace, Rabbis for Human Rights, and Torat Tzedek. One thing that has been really meaningful to me about living here is realizing how interconnected these organizations are. They function less as isolated groups and more as part of a broader ecosystem of people working toward justice and equality in Israel and Palestine. Many of my closest friendships in Jerusalem have grown out of that ecosystem — through Achvat Amim, Rabbis for Human Rights, and the diasporic collective All That's Left to name a few! I have found that what's powerful about this network is that the relationships are both professional and deeply personal. People collaborate across organizations, support each other's work, and build community together, which is what makes the movement feel sustainable even during very difficult moments.

WJN: When did you start working for Achvat Amim?

Miriam: I first connected with Achvat Amim in 2024 as a Justice Fellow and began my current role as Resource Development and Operations Director in 2025. In my role, I focus on sustaining and strengthening the organization — supporting fundraising, building relationships with supporters, growing our alumni network, and helping ensure that our programs can continue to run and expand. Achvat Amim is a movement-building platform that brings people, especially Jews from abroad, to Israel and the West Bank for immersive learning and volunteer work with Israeli and Palestinian civil society organizations. Participants live communally in Jerusalem, study the history and politics of the region, and spend time in communities in the West Bank learning directly from local partners. Our goal is to combine political education with real relationships so participants gain both the analytical frameworks and the personal connections needed to stay engaged in movements for justice long after they leave the program.

WJN: How has work with Achvat Amim changed since October 7 and the war in Gaza?

Miriam: The work has become both more urgent and more complicated. Since October 7 and the war in Gaza, the level of violence and instability in the region has increased dramatically, including rising displacement and attacks on Palestinian communities in the West Bank. At the same time, we've seen a growing sense among participants that solidarity and education cannot simply pause during war. Many people feel a deep responsibility to understand what is happening and to engage thoughtfully rather than from a distance. Despite the risks and uncertainty, Achvat Amim continues to bring participants into relationship with Israeli and Palestinian partners who are working for justice on the ground. In moments like this, building those relationships and supporting movements committed to self-determination for all peoples in this land becomes even more important.

WJN: What does "Solidarity of Nations" look like now that war has taken a dramatic shift?

Miriam: For us, "Solidarity of Nations" means building real relationships across communities and movements that are working toward justice and liberation. That includes Israelis, Palestinians, and international actors learning from one another and supporting each other's struggles to live in security and with dignity. Achvat Amim welcomes participants into an experiential learning process where they engage directly with communities and organizations on the ground. Through that process they grapple with questions of self-determination, homeland, and peoplehood while also learning practical skills in organizing and solidarity work. In a moment when the region feels increasingly polarized, solidarity means continuing to build relationships and shared movements that can imagine a future beyond state violence, occupation, war, and displacement.

WJN: Is there an increase in interest in your work? Does Achvat Amim have the capacity to do what it wants to do?

Miriam: Yes, we're seeing more interest than ever. Many people — especially younger Jews — are searching for ways to engage with Israel and Palestine that go beyond distant political debates. Because of that, we're receiving more applications to our programs than in previous years. People want to understand the reality on the ground and build relationships with communities directly affected by these dynamics. The biggest barrier for many applicants is financial. We see interest from people all over the world — from the United States, England, Germany, Turkey, South Africa, Russia, and beyond — who want to participate in Achvat Amim's programming. There really isn't another program that combines deep political education with relationship-building and solidarity work.

At the same time, Achvat Amim is still a relatively small organization, so expanding our capacity depends heavily on resources and community support. Because of our anti-racist and anti-occupation stance, our work is not typically funded by mainstream Jewish institutions, which makes providing scholarships particularly challenging.

What gives me hope is that we now have a strong alumni network around the world — people who continue this work in journalism, activism, education, and community organizing long after they leave the program. We believe that the movement for justice and liberation requires many different forms of engagement, and we want to equip as many people as possible to find their role in that work, both on the ground and in their home communities.

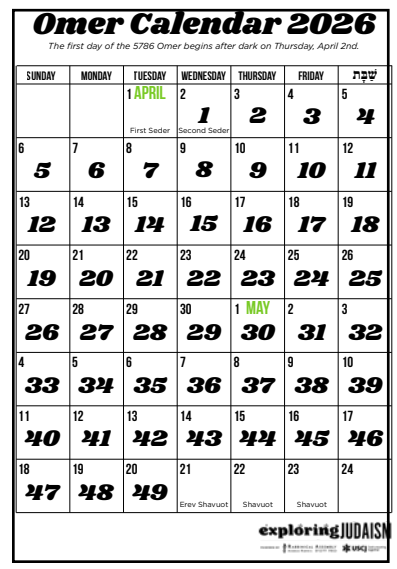
WJN: What is the central message you want to convey to the Jewish community of Washtenaw County about your work with Achvat Amim?

Miriam: One of the core ideas behind Achvat Amim is that movements for justice in Israel and Palestine are deeply connected to movements for justice in the diaspora. For me, a central message is that meaningful engagement is possible. Many people feel overwhelmed or polarized by conversations about Israel and Palestine, but Achvat Amim creates a framework where people can learn deeply, build relationships, and find what we call "right-sized" ways to participate in movements for justice — both on the ground and back in their home communities. I grew up in a Jewish community in Ann Arbor that encouraged moral responsibility and a dedication to tikkun olam, values which ultimately led me to this work. My hope is that communities like this one continue encouraging people to stay engaged and support efforts that build a more just future for everyone who calls this land home. ■

JCC Spotlight continues from pg 1

from the event will help sustain and expand the wide range of cultural, educational, and wellness programs the JCC offers, ensuring it remains a welcoming gathering place for people of all ages and backgrounds. This year's event is especially meaningful as it marks the first of what the JCC hopes will become an annual fundraising tradition, bringing the community together each year to celebrate and support the Center's mission.

As the JCC marks this milestone anniversary, the evening will shine a light on the people, programs, and partnerships that have shaped the Center over the past 40 years while helping ensure a vibrant future for Jewish life in the community.■



Omer Calendar 2026

The first day of the 5786 Omer begins after dark on Thursday, April 2nd.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	שַׁבָּת
		1 APRIL First Seder	2 1 Second Seder	3 2	4 3	5 4
6 5	7 6	8 7	9 8	10 9	11 10	12 11
13 12	14 13	15 14	16 15	17 16	18 17	19 18
20 19	21 20	22 21	23 22	24 23	25 24	26 25
27 26	28 27	29 28	30 29	1 MAY 30	2 31	3 32
4 33	5 34	6 35	7 36	8 37	9 38	10 39
11 40	12 41	13 42	14 43	15 44	16 45	17 46
18 47	19 48	20 49	21 Erev Shavuot	22 Shavuot	23 Shavuot	24

exploringJUDAISM

A2J Climate Circle

AARC's Climate Action Shabbat

By Rabbi Gabrielle Pescador

Rabbi Gabrielle Pescador

The Ann Arbor Reconstruction Congregation recently hosted a Climate Action Shabbat as part of the A2J Climate Circle's county-wide series. The morning invited participants to face the ecological crises of our time and to ask what a Jewish perspective can offer in response.

Jewish wisdom does not begin with policy. It begins with practice. Shabbat itself models ecological restraint. By stepping back from production, consumption, travel, and technology — even one day a week — we interrupt the relentless pressure placed on the Earth. We reduce our carbon footprint. We allow for rest.

The rabbis teach that collective rest carries transformative power: if every Jew truly kept even one Shabbat, redemption would immediately follow. We caught a glimpse of this during the early months of the pandemic, when reduced human activity allowed skies to clear and ecosystems to recalibrate. Shabbat offers that medicine weekly — a sacred pause for the entire web of life.

AARC's Climate Action Shabbat coincided with Shabbat Shekalim, when we read about the half-shekel each Israelite contributed for the upkeep of the Mishkan, the portable sanctuary in the wilderness. The contribution was equal — rich and poor alike — because sacred space depends on shared responsibility.

If we consider the Earth itself as Mishkan — not as backdrop or resource, but as the dwelling place of the Divine Presence and the luminous structure that shelters all life — then what must we do to honor it and care for it?

The Jerusalem Talmud tells of God showing Moses a "fiery coin," teaching that even a small offering, animated by intention, can rise like flame. Climate action works the same way. None of us can repair the whole. But each of us brings our half-shekel — through advocacy, reduced consumption, organizing, prayer or education. What matters is the fire within the act.

The service wove together Torah, music, and table conversations at the Oneg. Toward the end of the service, former AARC Rabbi Ora Nitkin-Kaner, now a climate chaplain, joined via Zoom to lead a meditation, helping us hold sorrow and possibility with steadiness and compassion.

As we concluded, we returned to Rabbi Tarfon's wisdom that repair begins with contribution: "It is not ours to finish the work, but neither are we free to neglect it."

May we treat this world as Mishkan, and may our small, fiery acts accumulate into something strong enough to shelter generations to come..■

Lobbying in Michigan for the whole earth

By Harvey Michaels, Beth Israel Congregation Green Team

The Jewish Earth Alliance (jewishearthalliance.org) (JEA) is part of a growing wave of Jewish climate activism that treats environmental protection not only as a political issue but as a moral obligation rooted in Jewish tradition. Formed as a national, volunteer-driven network, the Alliance helps Jews across the country speak directly to federal lawmakers about climate policy — something its founders saw missing from both the Jewish communal landscape and the broader climate movement. Each month, the group issues action alerts tied to federal legislation, offering concise background briefings and step-by-step guidance for contacting members of Congress.

JEA also organizes two national lobby days per year, one around Tisha B'Av and the other around Tu B'shvat, where volunteers meet with congressional offices to advocate for emissions reductions, environmental justice, and investments in clean energy. Most meetings are half an hour long via Zoom. The tone is deliberately accessible: you don't need to be a policy expert to participate, only someone who believes that protecting the planet is a Jewish responsibility.

The most recent lobby day was February 3. It was co-sponsored by 44 Jewish organizations across the country and drew 345 climate-concerned Jews who met with staff representing 55 Senate offices. Meetings were held with 34 Democrats, 19 Republicans, and both independents. The Michigan delegation met with staffers in Senators Elissa Slotkin's and Gary Peters' offices. Members of the Michigan delegation were from B'nai Israel and Beth Israel Congregation (Conservative), Congregation for Humanistic Judaism, Temple Kol Ami (Reform), Adamah, and the National Council of Jewish Women. Previous lobbying efforts have included members of Temple Beth Emeth in Ann Arbor and Congregation T'Chiyah in Ferndale.

We presented three requests to each senator: 1) strengthen FEMA by supporting and improving the FEMA Independence Act of 2025 (S.1246); 2) restore the Residential Clean Energy Credit and the Energy Efficient Home Improvement Credit, which were eliminated under H.R.1 (The One Big Beautiful Bill Act); and 3) support the prohibition of offshore drilling. Although the political deck is stacked against us at this time, things change, and it is important for Republican senators to know that they have pro-environment constituents and for Democratic senators to know that we support them..■

JEWISH EARTH ALLIANCE

Did You Know …

Why buy when you can borrow garden tools?

Reducing our overall consumption helps save energy. The Washtenaw County Conservation District (WCCD) and Growing Hope Urban Farm offer to loan various tools and equipment for farming, gardening, and conservation projects serving the Ypsilanti, Ann Arbor, and greater Washtenaw communities.

More info and to reserve your tools: tools.washtenawcd.org .■

A2J Climate Circle opposes Trump EPA rollback of environmental protections

By Michael S. Simon, MD, MPH

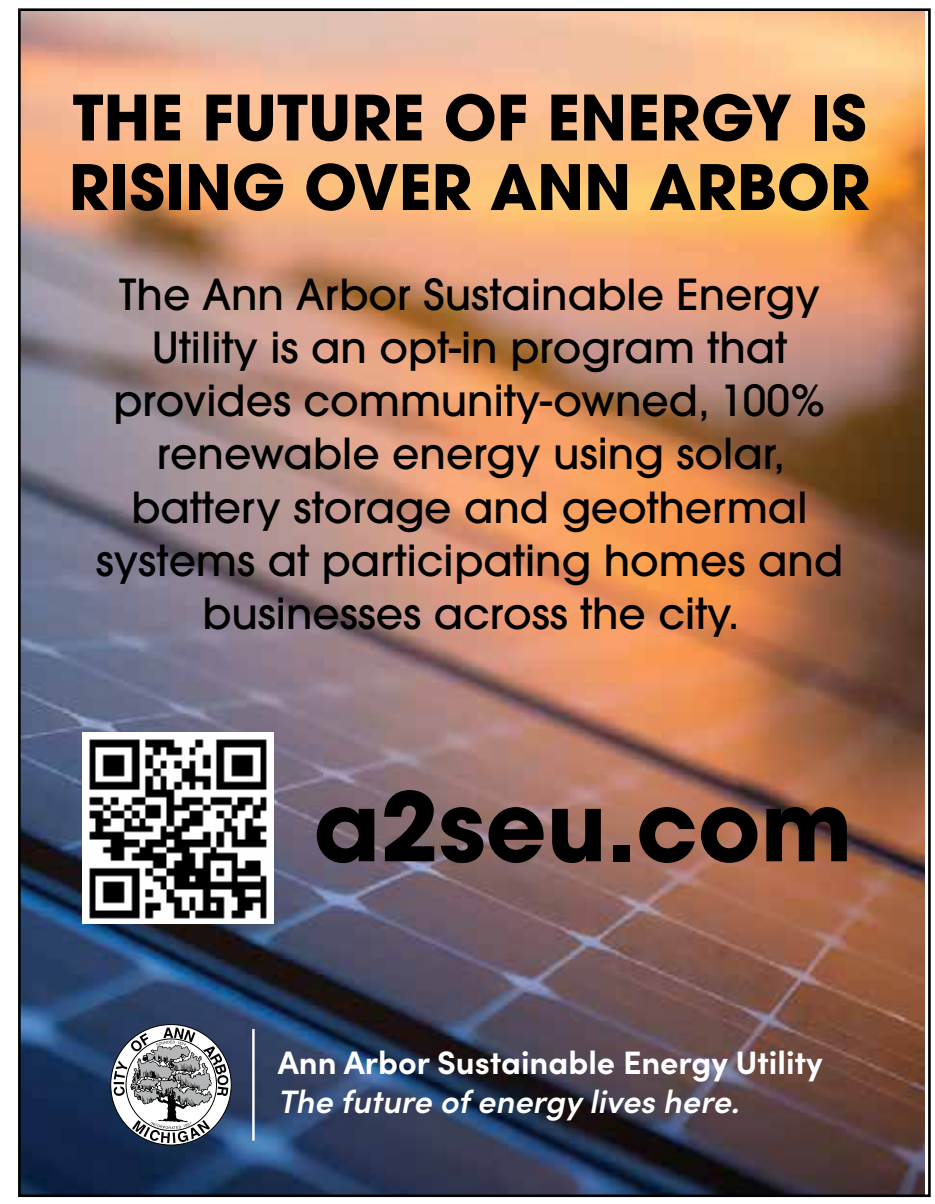
The Ann Arbor Jewish Climate Circle vehemently opposes the rollback of the Endangerment Finding and Greenhouse Gas Vehicle Standards endorsed by EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin under the direction of the Trump administration. This "rollback," which might be understood as an EPA action, is actually promoting inaction at a time when more action is needed to combat rapid climate change.

As established by the scientific community, the endangerment finding correctly concludes that climate change endangers the health and welfare of current and future generations. In Michigan, we are already exposed to toxic levels of smoke from climate-induced wildfires, weeks of extreme heat, heat-related deaths, and excessive flooding.

The established facts are that pollutants that contribute to greenhouse gases have a potent adverse impact on human health, including increased risk for heart and lung disease, and cancer. As a healthcare professional and medical oncologist, I am concerned that the trajectory of new cancer cases and deaths will undoubtedly rise as a result of the proposed changes. I also know that the underserved population is particularly susceptible to the harmful impacts of climate change.

I wonder how the EPA Administrator, Mr. Zeldin, will explain to his children and grandchildren that under his leadership, and by his decisions, the health of our country was degraded for generations. How will Mr. Zeldin respond to the resulting increased prevalence of childhood asthma, chronic lung disease, and other adverse health outcomes?

I strongly encourage Mr. Zeldin to embrace the Jewish concept of "Tikkun Olam," repairing the world, as a core principle, and to adhere to the responsibility incumbent on all of us to make the world a better place. ■



Feature

Dying for democracy in death

By Lauren I. Zinn

The first obligation of a Jewish community is to provide burial grounds for its members. So when I founded Jewbilation: Jewish Roots with Interfaith Wings in 2001, I looked for a burial place for then-members — a preserve dedicated to natural or green burials and not a "mow-free" plot on the edge of a conventional cemetery. (There is such a preserve in Waterford but for Christians only.) I wanted a place where non-Jewish family members would be welcomed to be buried alongside Jewish ones. I wanted all members (Jews and not) to have the choice of performing and/or receiving Jewish pre-burial rituals (or other rituals they so chose). What I wanted did not exist then. But today, we are on the cusp of embracing death care differently. And I believe many of us yearn for exactly what I do.

While our local Jewish community has several cemeteries, we do not have land dedicated to "natural or green burials" with a "conservation easement" (see definitions below). If we could be buried naturally, wouldn't we choose to be in alignment with our Jewish environmental values? If the land for our burials could be a nature preserve, wouldn't we want that too? I would love for the land above my dead body to be teeming with life … maturing native plants and trees, people gardening at the adjacent organic communal farm, meditators coming and going from the retreat center next door, children laughing and playing, and even goats roaming over the land.

I had the pleasure of meeting Tony Mayotte, co-founder and president of Jeremiah Commons, whose vision for the nonprofit he leads is exactly what I and so many like me are waiting for. With a seminarian background and a law degree (Spring 2016), Tony and Jeremiah Commons' board of directors plan to manifest this vision. For the first time, I feel hopeful that my body could be buried naturally, on land close to where I have lived my adult life, and with a conservation easement to protect the land from development in perpetuity.

I want my body to be buried in a beautiful, all-natural field with fieldstones instead of headstones, and walking trails. I am also thrilled that my Jewish and non-Jewish family members and non-Jewish friends could also be buried in the same place. I am proud to know that each of us can be buried (as bodies or as ashes) according to the customs of our chosen religions/spiritualities/personal wishes and aligned with environmental stewardship.

In addition to all of the above, I envision that we can participate in each other's customs and learn experientially about our different wisdom traditions. If my Muslim friend asked me to help wash her body according to her Islamic custom of purification along with Muslim prayers, I would be honored to do so. Likewise, I would want her to be able to help prepare my body for burial and to feel welcomed by members of a local hevra kadisha (see definition) to show her how.

Unfortunately, our local Jewish community lacks a hevra kadisha. Instead, we outsource these rituals to Jewish funeral homes in Oakland County. Thus, we add to pollution by schlepping bodies back and forth and we deny our community members a full Jewish practice. If we could, wouldn't we want to reduce our carbon footprint and give our members the opportunity to learn meaningful Jewish rituals? Afterall, preparing a body for burial is the greatest mitzvah, for there can be no expectation of reciprocation.

Twelve years ago, a few Jews from Ann Arbor attended a tahara in Lansing to learn from their hevra kadisha in hopes of starting one here. A local funeral home even agreed to allow a hevra kadisha to use its premises. At the time, I asked the leaders of this initiative if they would be open to non-Jews participating in a hevra kadisha or even receiving the rituals when they died, particularly if they were part of a Jewish family. I was told no. Today, I think we are ready to answer such questions with a more open mind and a resounding yes.

Note that the first official hevra kadisha was formed in Prague in 1569. The liturgy for burial (Ma'avar Yabok) was not written until 1626. In other words, a hevra kadisha is not based on halacha (law), like a quick burial and return to the earth, but on minhag (custom). Thus, we can form a hevra kadisha with new customs that reflect a greater vision for Judaism. So yes, our new hevra kadisha could allow non-Jews to help perform its rituals if requested by the deceased, or participate as part of an interfaith educational initiative. And yes, deceased non-Jews could receive pre-burial rituals (especially if they were part of a Jewish family). It should not matter if the givers or receivers of pre-burial rituals are affiliated, unaffiliated, religious, secular, rich, poor, in-married, inter-married, gay, trans, Zionist, non/post/anti-Zionist, or diasporic. In opening our hevra kadisha to learning with and alongside other local religious communities, we'd uplift Judaism to an Interspiritual form of community that I believe our children and grandchildren would be proud to inherit. To be buried among people of all faiths/none, according to each one's religious and cultural traditions, blessed by their communities, in shared space on common land, is a sign of interspiritual solidarity and religious maturity — something we need more of in a democracy. For democracy is something we choose to make together.

Let me tell the following true story as inspiration for democracy in death care. In the year 1660, the Anishinaabeg world at that time included only two types of people — inawemaagen (relatives) and meyaagizid (foreigners). At that time, the Anishinaabeg needed to transform enemies into relatives. Brilliantly, they held a Feast of the Dead ceremony. Members of all the different warring tribes gathered together. Each brought the bones of their dead. In addition to feasting and gift giving, they ceremonially buried the bones together. In that one act, former enemies literally and ritually became instant kin, sharing a sense of responsibility for each other. This "rebirth" expanded their collective social identity as well as their physical landscape for they could now move and trade more broadly. They had in effect created intertribal solidarity and in that lay their safety and sovereignty. Today, for Judaism and all the world's religions to survive, for the people of all traditions to feel safe, to exercise sovereignty, and to thrive together, we must choose interspiritual solidarity.

I am not suggesting we dig up and re-bury ancestral bones (though it's an entertaining idea) but I am asking us to think of our Judaism interspiritually. By forming a hevra kadisha that allows non-Jews to learn about, observe and/or perform Jewish pre-burial rites with us (not instead of us and not appropriating us), we share our tradition's wisdom with others and open ourselves to learning theirs. When my time comes, I plan to have a Jewish holy burial society welcome my Muslim, Native, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist and Humanist friends in addition to Jewish friends and volunteers to help with my pre-burial rites and I hope their religious communities will be honored to let me help with theirs, if asked. It's time our Jewish community reconsiders death care not only as an act of environmental responsibility, but also as an expression of social solidarity with people of all faiths. Let's not wait to die for this.

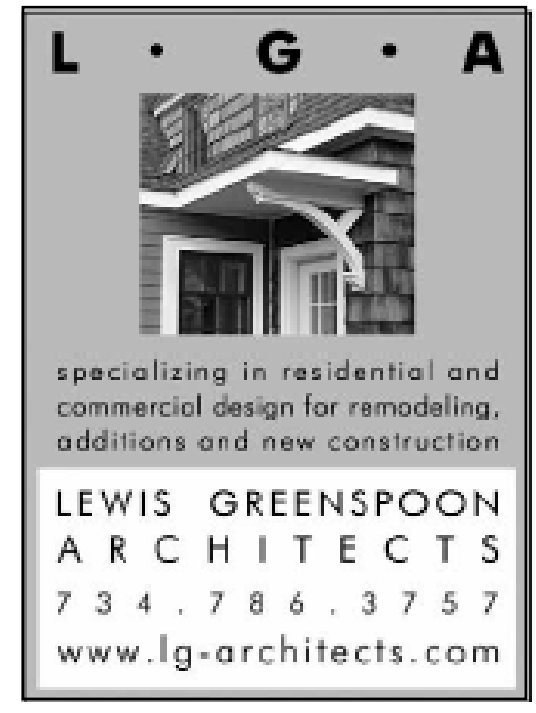
In short, people of all faiths and none in Washtenaw County are looking for what I describe above. Ever since Tony saw a natural burial preserve in North Carolina, he dreamed of starting one in Washtenaw County and all of us are welcome. So let's get the leaders of our diverse local faith communities to help raise funds for 50 to 180 acres (chai x 10!) so Jeremiah Commons can be a reality for all of us, before we die.

Some definitions:

Conservation Easement. Unlike land use regulation, a conservation easement is placed on property voluntarily by the owner whose rights are being restricted. The restrictions of the easement, once set in place, are usually perpetual, and reduce the market value of the property.

Hevra Kadisha is a Jewish volunteer "holy society" that performs sacred rituals for the deceased, ensuring they receive a traditional burial according to Jewish law, including the ritual washing (tahara) and dressing in shrouds, and providing constant vigil (shmirah) until burial, treating the body with utmost dignity, modesty, and respect as a profound act of kindness (chesed).

Natural or Green burial is an eco-friendly method of disposition that minimizes environmental impact by avoiding toxic embalming, concrete vaults, and non-biodegradable materials, allowing the body to decompose naturally in the earth, often in a biodegradable shroud or casket, promoting habitat conservation and reducing carbon emissions. It focuses on restoring natural landscapes, often using native plants as markers instead of headstones. ■



April at Beth Israel

Pesach Services at Beth Israel Congregation

Siyyum Ta'anit Bechorot
Wednesday, April 1, 7:30 a.m.
Join Beth Israel's Executive Director, Jerry Sorokin, as he leads Shacharit and teaches a Siyyum to break the fast of the firstborn.

Pesach Morning Services
Thursday, April 2, at 9:30 am.
Friday, April 3, at 9:30 a.m.
Wednesday, April 8, at 9:30 a.m.
Thursday, April 9, at 9:30 a.m. with Yizkor

Youth Service Experience with Rabbi Bair
Saturday April 4, 11, 18 & 25, at 11 a.m.
Youth Service Experience with Rabbi Bair now meets weekly at 11 a.m. Shabbat mornings. It is an interactive prayer service with a parsha play. (2nd grade and up. Younger kids are welcome with parent accompaniment). Meets in the M & M Chapel; ends with youth leading Adon Olam in the sanctuary.

Tot Shabbat
Saturday, April 11 and 25, at 11 a.m.
Join us for a playful morning of Jewish songs and stories. Challah and grape juice kiddush included. For kids age 1 through 1st grade and parents, but all are welcome to join. Please note that in order to participate in Tot Shabbat, all tots must be accompanied by an adult. Thanks for helping to make this fun and safe for everyone!

Havdallah 101
Sunday, April 12, at 10:30 a.m.
Starting and ending Shabbat with the traditional blessings truly invites a sense of holiness, togetherness, gratitude, and shalom bayit. No knowledge of Hebrew or prayers necessary. Learn the "how-to" of making Havdalah at home with Rabbi Bair. Learn how to end Shabbat on a beautiful note!

ISRAEL360 Presents Dr. Aaron Rock-Singer
"Whose Holy Land? Religion and Politics in Mandatory Palestine, 1917–1948"
Sunday, April 12, at 7 p.m.
Dr. Aaron Rock-Singer is a transnational historian of the modern Middle East. He is currently a Research Fellow at the University of Michigan's Raoul Wallenberg Institute. Questions? Please email ISRAEL360@bethisrael-aa.org. ISRAEL360 is a congregant-initiated effort which seeks to elevate and enhance congregational knowledge of Israel past and present by examining current issues, technology, science, art, literature, media, politics, history, and more. For more details and registration, go to the calendar on bethisrael-aa.org.

Rosenberg Scholar-in-Residence Weekend with Dr. Benjamin S. Sommer
Beth Israel Congregation is proud to welcome Dr. Benjamin Sommer as this year's Rosenberg Scholar-in-Residence. Dr. Sommer is a preeminent biblical scholar and Jewish theologian serving as a Professor of Bible and Ancient Semitic Languages at The Jewish Theological Seminary. A prolific author and lecturer, Dr. Sommer's research explores the intersections of Israelite religion, biblical theology, and modern Jewish thought. He is widely recognized for his award-winning books, including *The Bodies of God* and *The World of Ancient Israel and Revelation and Authority: Sinai in Jewish Scripture and Tradition*, a finalist for the National Jewish Book Award. Described by Ha'aretz as both a "traditionalist and yet an iconoclast," Dr. Sommer has held prestigious fellowships at the National Humanities Center and the Shalom Hartman Institute, bringing a synthesis of intellectual acuity and deep textual knowledge to his work. See the calendar at bethisrael-aa.org for event details and to register for Shabbat dinner on April 17.
The Rosenberg Lecture Series is endowed through a generous contribution by Vic (z"l) & Val Rosenberg in memory of Cantor Alfred & Alice Rosenberg. We are grateful for the Rosenberg family's commitment to Beth Israel and to Jewish education.
Friday April 17: 6 p.m. "What Does It Mean to Say the Bible Is Monotheistic?"
Friday April 17: 7:30 p.m. "Psalms of Crisis and a Biblical Theology of Prayer"
Saturday April 18: 12:30 p.m. "What Are We Doing When We Recite the Shema? (Or: What the Wolverines Contributed to Our Understanding of Brit)"
Saturday April 18: 7:30 p.m. "Tradition and Change in Jewish Law"
Sunday April 19: 10 a.m. "How Can Judaism Provide Real Life Guidance Today?"

Community Wide Yom HaZikaron
Monday, April 20, at 6:30 p.m.
Join the Ann Arbor Jewish Community for Sharing Fates, an Israeli Memorial Day Commemoration at Beth Israel Congregation. This is a commemoration of Israel's fallen soldiers and victims of terrorism worldwide. Please wear white shirts. Song circle to follow the ceremony.

Klezmer, A Living Tradition
Sunday, April 16, at 3 p.m.
Join us for an afternoon and evening of klezmer music and fun! We will have a free instrumental klezmer and dance workshop from 3–4, refreshments and a break from 4–5, and a free concert from 5–6:30pm. The performers and educators include Jake Shulman-Ment, Raffi Boden, Ira Temple, and Hannah Lewis. This community event is co-sponsored by Jewish Federation of Greater Ann Arbor, the Community Engagement Fund, Beth Israel Congregation, Ann Arbor Reconstructionist Congregation, The Ethel Hyman and Rose Kaplan Foundation, and Ann Arbor Community for Traditional Music and Dance. See the calendar at bethisrael-aa.org for event details and to register.

Talmud Study with Rabbi Dobrusin via Zoom
Mondays at 4 p.m.
The class meets on Zoom on Monday afternoons from 4–5:15. We will read the text in the original Hebrew or Aramaic with an accompanying English translation and discuss the text in English. No familiarity with Hebrew or prior experience studying Talmud is required. This fall and winter, we will be studying from the third chapter of the tractate of Bava Metzia which addresses issues of the obligations and responsibilities of people who are taking care of objects or animals belonging to another person. All are welcome!

Theology Book Club — Online
Wednesdays at 7 p.m.
Beth Israel Congregation's Theology Book Club welcomes you to join them to read together and discuss books on Jewish thought and beliefs. The books are in English. Contact Paul Shifrin at (248) 514-7276 for more information.

In Person and Online Services

Everyone is welcome to join Beth Israel for services, classes, and events. Services are being held in person and virtually, unless otherwise noted on the calendar. Below is a list of the links to participate virtually in services at Beth Israel. Beth Israel is live streaming services on the Beth Israel YouTube channel (Beth Israel Congregation AA MI). All links are also available on the Beth Israel homepage (www.bethisrael-aa.org). Please note that passwords are used. Contact the office to get the passwords at office@bethisrael-aa.org.

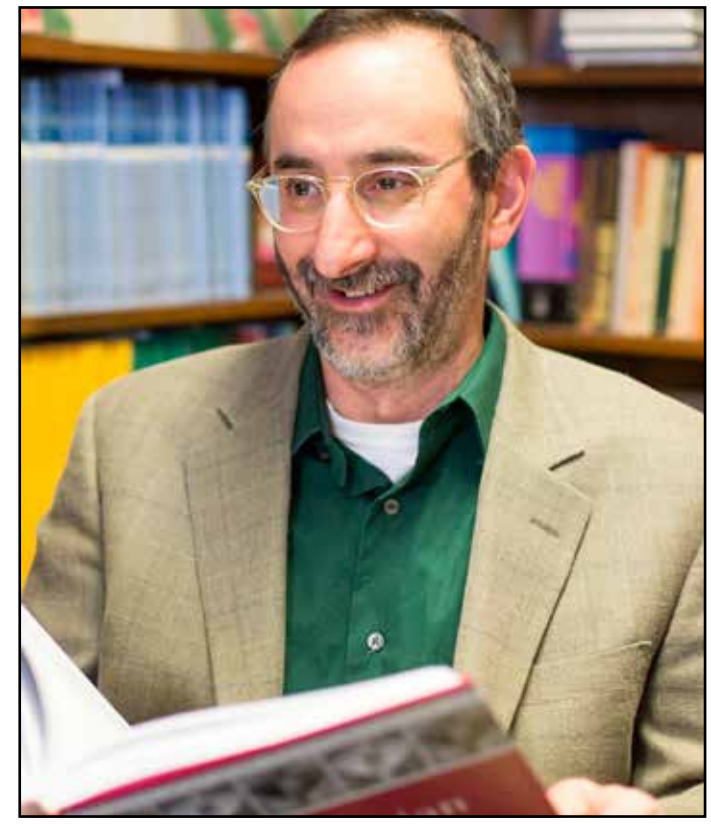
Minyan
Sundays at 9:30 a.m., in the M&M Chapel and online
Sundays–Thursdays at 7:30 p.m., online only

Friday Evening Services — in person and virtual
Kabbalat Shabbat Service at 6 p.m.

Shabbat Morning Services — in person and virtual
Saturdays at 9:30 a.m..■

Unlocking the secrets of Sinai: Weekend with Dr. Benjamin Sommer

By Beth Israel Congregation staff



Dr. Benjamin Sommer

Beth Israel's upcoming Scholar in Residence weekend will feature Dr. Benjamin Sommer, one of the more prominent and influential voices in modern biblical scholarship. A Professor of Bible and Ancient Semitic Languages at the Jewish Theological Seminary, Dr. Sommer is renowned for his ability to bridge the gap between rigorous academic criticism and deep, observant Jewish faith.

Sommer's first book, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40–66* (1998) examines how the author of "Second Isaiah" utilized and reinterpreted earlier biblical texts. Sommer explores the literary technique of allusion, arguing that the prophet was a sophisticated reader of scripture who used intertextuality to shape his theological message. The prophets of the Exile were not just messengers, he showed, but sophisticated readers who reinterpreted earlier texts to provide hope for a shattered nation.

In his next book, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel,* Sommer challenges the common idea that ancient Israelite religion was strictly "incorporeal." He explores an ancient Near Eastern concept where gods had multiple, fluid bodies — a notion he argues is present in some biblical traditions and later influenced Jewish mysticism (Kabbalah) and Christian Trinitarianism. In his landmark Revelation and Authority, Sommer proposes a "participatory model" of revelation, suggesting that the divine command at Sinai was a nonverbal event that human prophets then translated into language. This model allows Sommer to bridge the gap between traditional Jewish halakhah and modern biblical criticism, arguing that the human role in crafting scripture does not diminish its divine authority. And his section of the JPS Bible Commentary on Psalms, he explores how the "Songs of Ascents" continue to provide a roadmap for the modern spiritual journey.

Dr. Sommer will teach throughout the weekend, from Friday evening through Sunday morning, as well as join the congregation for their traditional Shabbat davening and meals. Don't miss this opportunity to learn from, and socialize with, one of the leading Bible scholars of our time.

The Rosenberg Lecture Series is endowed through a generous contribution by Vic (z"l) & Val Rosenberg in memory of Cantor Alfred & Alice Rosenberg. Beth Israel is grateful for the Rosenberg family's commitment to the congregation and to Jewish education..■

Changing the story: The William Davidson Jewish College Loan Program

By Dr. Jonathan Fellows

Dr. Jonathon Fellows

Rewind to September 2012. I was sitting with David Contorer, Executive Director of Hebrew Free Loan (HFL), at our first meeting. A mutual friend had introduced us, but what I remember most clearly is what I said that day:

"I received my college loans, paid them off, then I forgot about HFL and HFL forgot about me. We need to change that story."

As a student, I received education loans from the Jewish Education Loan Service (JELS) for both my undergraduate studies at the University of Michigan, where I earned a BA in Judaic Studies, and later for medical school at Michigan State University. Those interest-free loans helped me buy books, gas and rent, and other day-to-day expenses as a college student.

But what stayed with me most was not the financial support. It was the message.

The JELS staff made one thing very clear: every dollar repaid is immediately recycled to help the next student. These weren't just loans. They were links in a chain. When you repaid your loan, you weren't just fulfilling an obligation, you were helping someone else.

That idea resonated deeply, so I made it a priority to repay my interest-free JELS loans first, before my interest-bearing federal loans. That decision wasn't about math, but rather mission. It was about tzedakah, our moral obligation as Jews to care for one another.

From recipient to responsibility

In June 2013, I joined the Hebrew Free Loan board and immediately began participating in client loan interviews. HFL board members communicate directly with borrowers. We hear their stories, talk about their needs, and work through loan amounts and repayment plans. Together with HFL's professional staff, we do everything we can to find a way to say "yes."

That direct connection is powerful because you see people navigating unexpected medical bills, small business owners trying to grow, or students chasing dreams that sometimes feel out of reach.

It is humbling, personal, and deeply meaningful.

Building something that lasts

In 2014, a transformative step forward occurred with the creation of the William Davidson Jewish College Loan Program (WDJCLP). The program combined the legacy JELS initiative with an $8 million grant from the William Davidson Foundation and the support of many generous donors.

The vision was simple but powerful: provide critical "last dollars" to Jewish students. These loans bridge the gap between scholarships, savings, and federal aid, and the real cost of higher education including tuition, housing, books, and living expenses. That final gap is often what determines whether a student can attend their school of choice, or attend at all.

Over the years, our student portfolio grew, and with continued partnership and strategic fundraising, we worked to ensure the program could become "evergreen," meaning that as loans are repaid, the funds are recycled to support new students, creating a self-sustaining cycle of opportunity.

This is what makes Hebrew Free Loan extraordinary. The impact doesn't end. It multiplies.

A personal full circle moment

In May 2019, my wife Suzanne (a former JELS graduate loan recipient) and I hosted a fundraising event. With tremendous support from HFL's professional team, we raised $180,000 for the college loan program.

Current and former loan recipients shared how these funds helped them close the gap and pursue their education. Years earlier, I had walked into a meeting determined to "change the story." That night, I realized the story had already changed. I was no longer just a recipient, I was part of the chain.

I remain deeply grateful to the individuals and families who establish education loan funds that will live on in perpetuity, supporting generations of Jewish students they may never meet. Their generosity becomes someone else's opportunity.

The impact today and tomorrow

Today, WDJCLP represents more than 70% ($13.6 million) of HFL's total outstanding, interest-free loan portfolio of $18.8 million, and HFL maintains an extraordinary 99% repayment rate.

Beginning with the April 1, 2026, application cycle, graduate students from Michigan who are enrolled in schools outside our state will now be eligible to apply for these loans. In the past, eligibility was limited to in-state schools. But as we listened to our community, we recognized that graduate students, some pursuing medicine, dentistry, or law, often leave Michigan for programs or specialties that aren't available here. They face a choice between affordability and a dream, and can carry significant financial burdens as a result.

More than college loans

Hebrew Free Loan's mission is simple: lend money, interest-free, to Michigan Jewish residents in need with privacy, dignity, and compassion. Having once been a borrower and now serving as a board member, I have experienced both sides of that mission. I have seen how one interest-free loan can preserve dignity, create opportunity, and strengthen our community.

The dollars circulate. The impact compounds. The story continues.

And this time, we won't forget it.

Dr. Jonathan Fellows is Secretary of the Hebrew Free Loan Board. HFL's William Davidson Jewish College Loan Program offers interest-free loans to Michigan's Jewish community, specifically for higher education. Applications are open April 1–May 15, and July 1–31. Learn more, and apply online at jewishcollegeloansmi.org. For additional information, contact Katie Wallace at 248.723.8184 or kwallace@hfldetroit.org. ■

Rabbis Corner

Rabbi Aharon Goldstein

"Moses, a man of G-d."

By Rabbi Aharon Goldstein, Chabad of Ann Arbor

The Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt by Moses, about whom our Sages said, "Moses was designated for redemption from the moment he was created." Yet Moses' role as redeemer is not limited to the exodus from Egypt; our Sages tell us he will also bring the final Redemption with Moshiach: "Moses was the first and will be the last redeemer."

The Torah expresses Moses' uniqueness with the words "Moses, a man of G-d."

The Talmud finds this description problematic. "If he is 'G-d,' why use the word 'man'? And if he is 'man,' why use the word 'G-d'?" it asks. The Talmud then goes on to answer its own question. "His lower half was 'man,' yet his upper half was G-d." In other words, Moses was a unique combination of the human and the Divine.

Accordingly, the task of Moses was to forge a connection between G-d and man, between the supernatural and the physical worlds. G-d's revelation of Himself through supernatural miracles is not enough; the ultimate goal of creation is to introduce holiness into the physical realm, where it can unite with nature and be one with it.

When the revelation of G-dliness supersedes nature, there is no true connection formed between the Divine and physical reality.

Although the world may be temporarily shaken by the display of G-d's infinite power, as soon as the miracle has ended, everything reverts to its former condition. When, however, G-d reveals Himself within the limitations of natural law, nature itself is shown to be G-dly.

This connection between natural and supernatural can only be effected by a Moses who serves as intermediary between the two, as it states in the Torah, "I stand between you and G-d." His function is to connect the Jewish people to their Source and thus produce a true bond between them.

For this reason it was necessary that Moses embody both characteristics, the human and the Divine. On one hand he is a human being, on the other, he is higher than any other person. This dual nature enables him to successfully combine the physical and the spiritual, imbuing material reality with G-dliness according to G-d's plan.

This special quality will find its ultimate expression in Moshiach, the reason why Moses is credited with bringing the future Redemption.

Moshiach's task is to complete the work begun by Moses, perfecting the unification of natural and supernatural that will characterize the Messianic era.

About the coming of Moshiach, the Torah states, "Like the days of your going out of Egypt, I will show you wonders." The miracles of the final Redemption will make the miracles that occurred in Egypt pale by comparison — demonstrating to the entire world that nature is also G-dly.

Obituaries

The WJN prints obituaries, memories, and eulogies free of charge for family members of Washtenaw Jewish community members as a service to the community and to honor the lives of those who have passed away. When local congregations send condolence notices to the WJN, the editor searches for obituaries online. Also, community members are invited to send obituaries to the editor.

Sara Mendel, of Ann Arbor, died on February 27, aged 95. She was a woman of grace, warmth, and intellect, and a devoted daughter, sister, wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, aunt, and friend. She was born Sara Pinsky in Chicago on May 31, 1930, the third of eight children of recent immigrants from Belarus, Schneer Zalman and Rebecca (Solovyev) Pinsky. Her father sold fruit from a horse-drawn cart, so there was always food on the table, but their circumstances were modest. Sara slept in a bed with her two older sisters and sometimes with one of her younger ones as well. She had to learn independence at a very young age; when she broke an arm at age 11, she had to make her way to the hospital herself on public transport. She was always an excellent student, at the top of her class, and not long after graduating from high school she enrolled in Roosevelt College. There she met Arthur Mendel, and they married shortly after she graduated. After a period in Finland, where Sara, a very talented linguist, learned Swedish, they spent time in Cambridge, Massachusetts, while Arthur earned his PhD at Harvard, then in Chicago, New York City, and Iowa, where he had academic appointments, before settling in Ann Arbor, where Arthur served as a history professor until his death in 1988. Sara always had an editorial hand in his books, and brought his final book, *Visions and Violence*, to publication posthumously.

Though Sara taught for a time in public and Hebrew schools and edited Hebrew instructional materials used at the University of Michigan, home and family were the center of her world. Sara and Arthur had five children, to whom she was a loving and deeply caring mother. Their home was the first address for Chabad House in Ann Arbor. A keen eye for antiques helped stretch Arthur's relatively modest salary. They spent sabbatical times in Europe and three times in Israel, with which Sara, who was passionately Jewish, developed a deep and abiding affinity. After the fall of the Soviet Union, in a period of dangerous antisemitism, she worked ably, persistently, and energetically to bring to the United States more than a score of relatives, some of whom had been presumed dead in the Holocaust. They settled in Ann Arbor, and have become a thriving part of the community. Well into her 90s, Sara studied languages and read avidly (and rapidly) in three of them. She embraced life to the end, but faced death unflinchingly. She is survived by her children Ruth (Thomas, deceased), Aaron (Matilde Castiel), Matthew (Dragana), Joanna Friedman (Richard), and Aliza (Peter Tierney), her grandchildren Jacob, Adam (Kaley Stroup), Zachary (Laina Weinman), Lazar Mendel, Rebecca, Daniel, and Julia Friedman, and Sophia and Max Tierney, great-grandchildren Owen, Gabriel, and Cecilia, with one more on the way, her sisters Ida Graber, Dora Prinz, and Miriam Stein, and her dearest friend, Suzanne Whitney. She was predeceased by her sisters Eleanor Wisotsky and Lillian Rubenstein and her brothers Dov Pinsky and Seymour Pinsky.

Eileen Anita Pritzker or Yocheved Chana bas Avraham, lovingly known as "Mom," was born in Philadelphia, where she spent much of her childhood. Her grandparents owned a grocery store and ice cream parlor, with an apartment above the store where she spent countless hours — a setting that helped shape her early sense of family, community, connection, and hard work. She grew up as the only child in a single-parent household after her parents divorced when she was four years old — something quite uncommon at the time and an experience that profoundly shaped her strength and independence. From a young age, Mom developed a very strong sense of right and wrong, an enviable work ethic, and a resilience that would define her life and be passed on to her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

At the age of four, Eileen moved with her mother to Baltimore. It was there that, at just 15 years old, she met the love of her life, Herbert, at a fraternity party — she was 15, he was 16. Even then, she was networking and meeting people with confidence and ease. That chance meeting began a remarkable love story that spanned 68 beautiful years. Her beloved husband passed away in November 2023, closing a chapter that truly defined a lifetime.

Throughout those years, they were deeply involved in their temple and their community — participating in the sisterhood, helping in the gift shop, and supporting countless community events. They believed deeply in building community and strengthening the institutions that brought people together.

But the true center of Herbert and Eileen's lives was always family. Some of the happiest memories were forged around the kitchen table — playing Scrabble, Boggle, and Rummikub. Those games were never just games; they were the moments where the bonds of love, laughter, and unity that hold our family together today were formed.

In 2014, when they moved to Beachwood, Ohio, that beloved tradition began again. Being at Herb and Eileen's home every Sunday morning for breakfast wasn't merely tradition or ritual — it was religion.

She is survived by her three children, 12 grandchildren, and 18 great-grandchildren — a living legacy of strength, resilience, humor, and heart.

Contributions in Eileen's memory may be made to Temple Emanu El (www.teecleve.org).

Max "Mickey" Seelenfreund Stern was a man of dignity, generosity, and passion with immense pride in his Jewish heritage. Born in Yugoslavia to Fanny and Mark Seelenfreund, he immigrated to the United States at the age of 12 in search of religious freedom and connection to family. He raised his own family in Michigan with his wife, Judith Deborah Stern, who was also his business partner of Moss and Associates, which they ran together for 45 years! They then opened eautiful Beginnings, A Children's Boutique. Mickey was respected and adored by his employees and customers.

Anyone who knew Mickey well, knew that his real passion extended beyond sales to investment strategy and earnings. He had a brilliant mind and strategized wisely. Mickey worked tirelessly to provide for his family, especially for his daughters, Michelle and Natalie. He gave to them and others with a loving and generous heart.

Mickey is known well throughout Jewish organizations and educational institutions for his generosity and dedication to Jewish education. As the only living child to two Holocaust survivors, he was a proud Jew and a passionate supporter of Israel.

A man of family values, he worked hard to pass down his beliefs and passions to his children and grandchildren. He taught all of us to work hard to achieve our aspirations and always be proud of our heritage.

Mickey was respected as a father, grandfather, philanthropist, businessman, investor, and generous individual who took the time to engage with others and support them on their professional tracks.

He passed away on February 21 in his home in Boca Raton, Florida, and leaves behind his devoted wife of 52 years, Judith Deborah Stern, and daughters Michelle (and Warren Samberg) and Natalie (and Adam Herzog). His grandchildren, Landyn, Aiden, Brooke, and Hana, who respect and adore him, will carry on his beautiful legacy. Family in Israel and Buffalo, New York, were also like siblings to him and will work to carry on his values as well. .■

TBE events in April

Events and services are both in person and/or virtual. Please see www.templebethemeth.org for full details, location information, and links.

Tot Shabbat Service & Dinner
Fridays at 5:45 p.m.
Join the Clergy to celebrate Shabbat with fun activities, stories, songs, and age-appropriate learning for children ages 0–5. Registration requested.

Elementary Shabbat Service & Dinner (every second Friday of the month)
Fridays at 5:45 p.m.
A short service, song session, and community building! Most appropriate for children ages 5–10 and their parents, grandparents, and other adults. Everyone is welcome! Registration requested.

Wine & Cheese Shabbat Reception
Fridays at 6 p.m. (except for the second Friday of each month)

Shabbat Service
Fridays at 6:30 p.m. (Every second Friday of the month is at 7:30 p.m.)

Shabbat morning Torah study
Saturdays at 8:50 a.m.
Join us for this weekly discussion of the Torah portion.

Saturday Shabbat service
Saturdays at 10 a.m.

Weekday morning blessings
Weekdays at 9:15 a.m.
Join TBE lay leaders each weekday morning for a short service of song, poetry, and meditation.

Twenty-five-minute mindfulness with Jewish spiritual director Linda Greene
Tuesdays at 8:30 a.m.
Zoom room opens at 8:15 a.m. for optional check-in. Blessing and intention setting 8:30–8:35 a.m. Meditate 8:35–9 a.m. Start your day centered and connected.

Queer Torah Study
Tuesdays at 7 p.m.
Join us on Zoom for a discussion of queer themes in the weekly Torah portion! Led by Ari Marcotte, Zelda Marcotte & Ari Smith. Guest leaders welcome! Contact Zelda (zeldamaybiz@gmail.com) for more information.

Back Door Food Pantry
Thursdays, 4 to 7 p.m.

Meditation with Claire Weiner
Thursdays at 5 p.m.
Join Claire Weiner for a 40-minute meditation session.

Lunch & Learn with Rabbi Whinston
Fridays at 12 p.m.

Weekly Mahj
Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m.
Wednesdays at 12:30 p.m.

WTBE Gift Shop Open
Friday at 5:30 p.m. (Every second Friday of the month is at 7:30 p.m.)
Washtenaw County's only Judaica Shop!

Community Passover Seder
Thursday, April 2, at 5 p.m.

Leviticus Through a Gendered Lens
Mondays, April 6 and 27, at 12 noon and 7:30 p.m.

WTBE Historical Novel Reading Group
Wednesday, April 8, at 1 p.m.

Yizkor Service and Luncheon
Thursday, April 9, at 10 a.m.

Jewish Book Club
Thursdays, April 9, 16, 23, and 30, at 11 a.m.

Family Camp
Friday, April 10, at 6:45 p.m.

Yom HaShoah Service,
Sunday, April 12, at 7:30 pm
Generations After of Temple Beth Emeth, a group of adult children whose parents survived the Holocaust, warmly welcomes you to attend their 22nd annual Yom HaShoah service. This year's theme, "Finding Community, Embracing our Heritage," will be presented with original writings from members of Generations After and music by the TBE Adult Volunteer Choir, Kol HaLev.
Time after time, those who attend these services remark on how moved they are to listen and bear witness to the trauma, resilience, and insights they hear expressed. The many years of presenting narratives about their families' survival stories led to the publication of The Ones Who Remember: Second -Generation Voices of the Holocaust, an anthology of personal experiences of the authors growing up in the shadow of the Holocaust. The book has won many awards since its release and Generations After still has many stories to tell. This service is open to the whole community and no reservations are required

WTBE Fiber Arts
Monday, April 13, at 7 p.m.

Monthly Rosh Chodesh Circle
Wednesday, April 15, at 5:30 p.m.

Renaissance Group visit of Holocaust Museum in Farmington Hills
Sunday, April 19, at 11 a.m.

SAI Reads Who Cares?: The Elderly in Fiction and Tradition
Monday, April 20, at 12 p.m.

Jewish Medical Ethics
Tuesdays, April 21 and 28, at 10 a.m.

Bereavement Group
Wednesday, April 9, at 4 p.m.

83 Bar/Bat Mitzvah Shabbat Service
Friday, April 24, at 6:30 p.m.

Celebrations of Wisdom
Saturday, April 25, at 7 p.m.

Spring Salads: Plant-Forward Potluck
Sunday, April 26, at 12:30 p.m.

Borderland The Line Within Documentary
Tuesday, April 28, at 6:30 p.m. .■

Alicia Jo Rabins and JCLP present:

Bringing Biblical Women to Life through Song and Storytelling

The Jewish Communal Leadership Program at U-M invites you to an evening with Alicia Jo Rabins, feminist Torah teacher and indie-folk musician, presenting Girls in Trouble—a song cycle bringing Biblical women to life through music and storytelling. JCLP student Allie Rosenberg will open with a creative musical set. Join us for a handcrafted beverage, thoughtful discussion, and a celebration of Jewish communal joy.

SUNDAY APRIL 12, 2026
6:00 PM

FREE COFFEE TEA ESPRESSO DECAF

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JEWISH COMMUNAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

יִזְכּוֹר
Ann Arbor Jewish Community
Israeli Memorial Day Commemoration
Sharing Fates
Monday, April 20th, 2026
Ceremony starts at 6:30pm
At Beth Israel Congregation
REGISTER NOW AT:
Please wear white shirts
Song circle to follow the ceremony.
Commemorating Israel's Fallen Soldiers and Victims of Terrorism Worldwide

Yom Ha'Atzmaut
(Independence Day)
ISRAELI BLOCK PARTY
Wednesday, April 22, 5-8pm
at the JCC of Greater Ann Arbor
REGISTER NOW!
TOUR THROUGH ISRAEL
FOOD & DRINK
LAWN GAMES
CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES
LIVE MUSIC from Israel - HaShayara Project
$10 IN ADVANCE & $15 AT THE DOOR
THE MOST FUN YOU'LL HAVE IN ISRAEL ...IN ANN ARBOR
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Jewish Federation of Greater Ann Arbor
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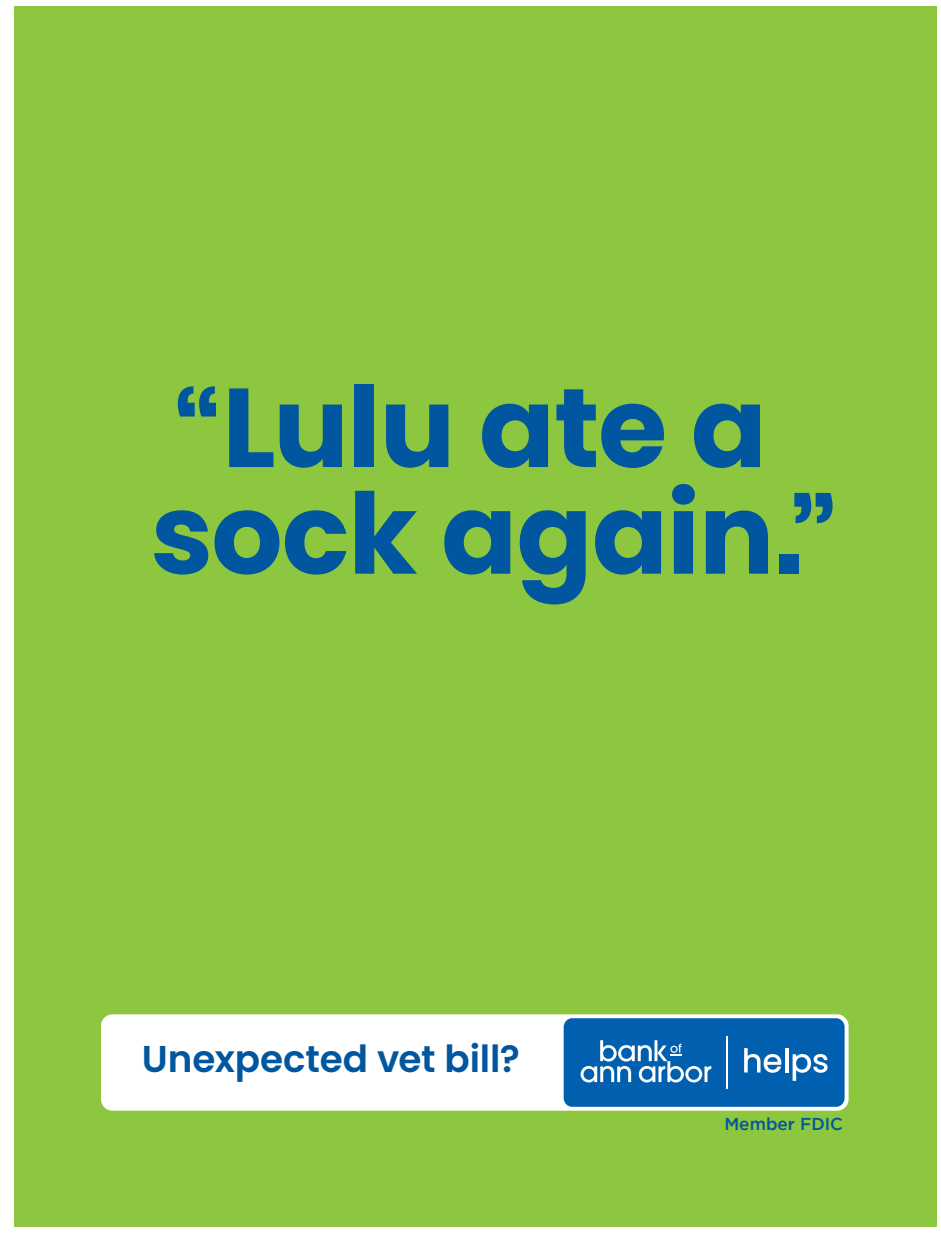
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Sunday, April 19 • 11am–4pm
Ann Arbor District Library
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Create, play, explore!
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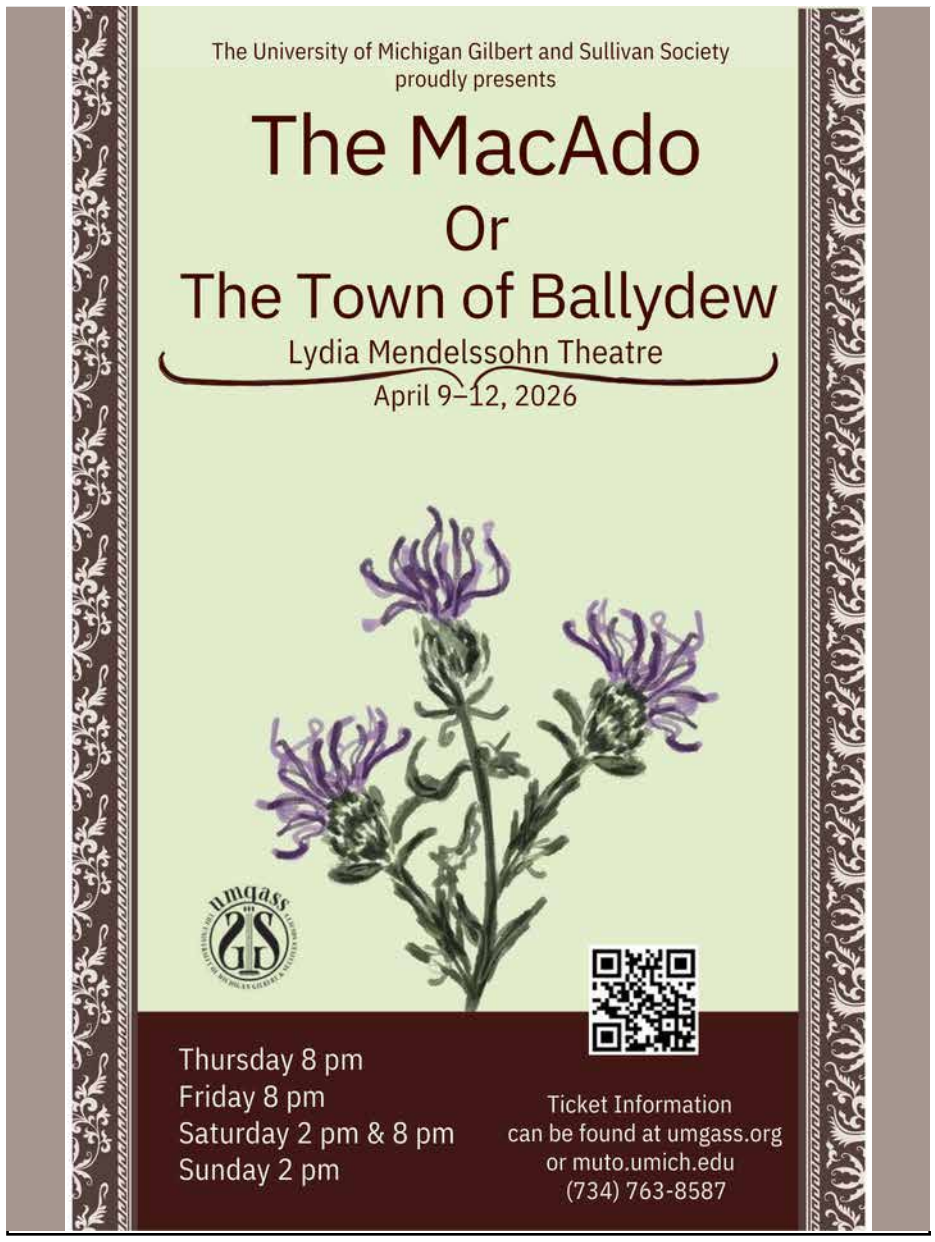
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The MacAdo
Or
The Town of Ballydew
Lydia Mendelssohn Theatre
April 9–12, 2026
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Thursday 8 pm
Friday 8 pm
Saturday 2 pm & 8 pm
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Ticket Information
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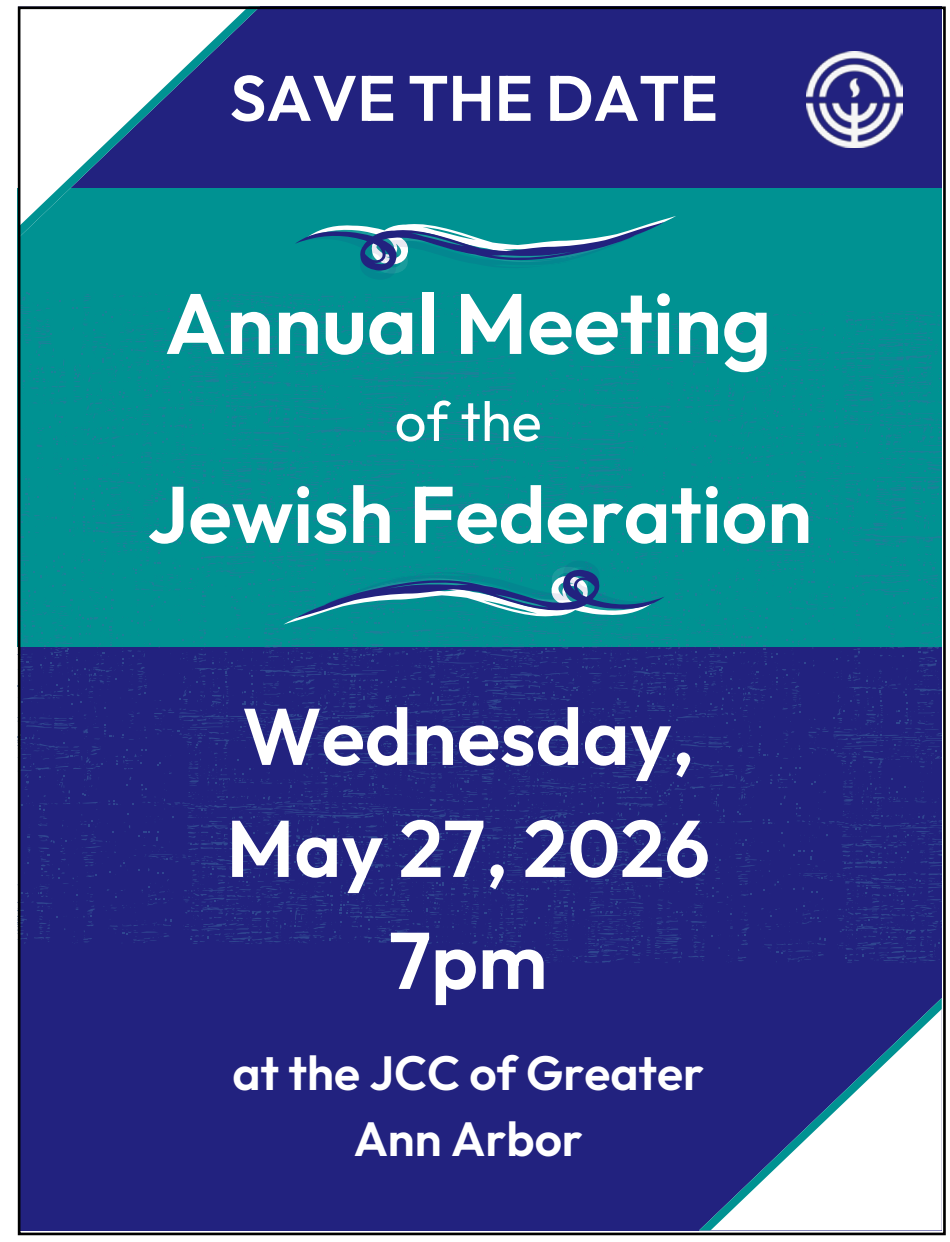
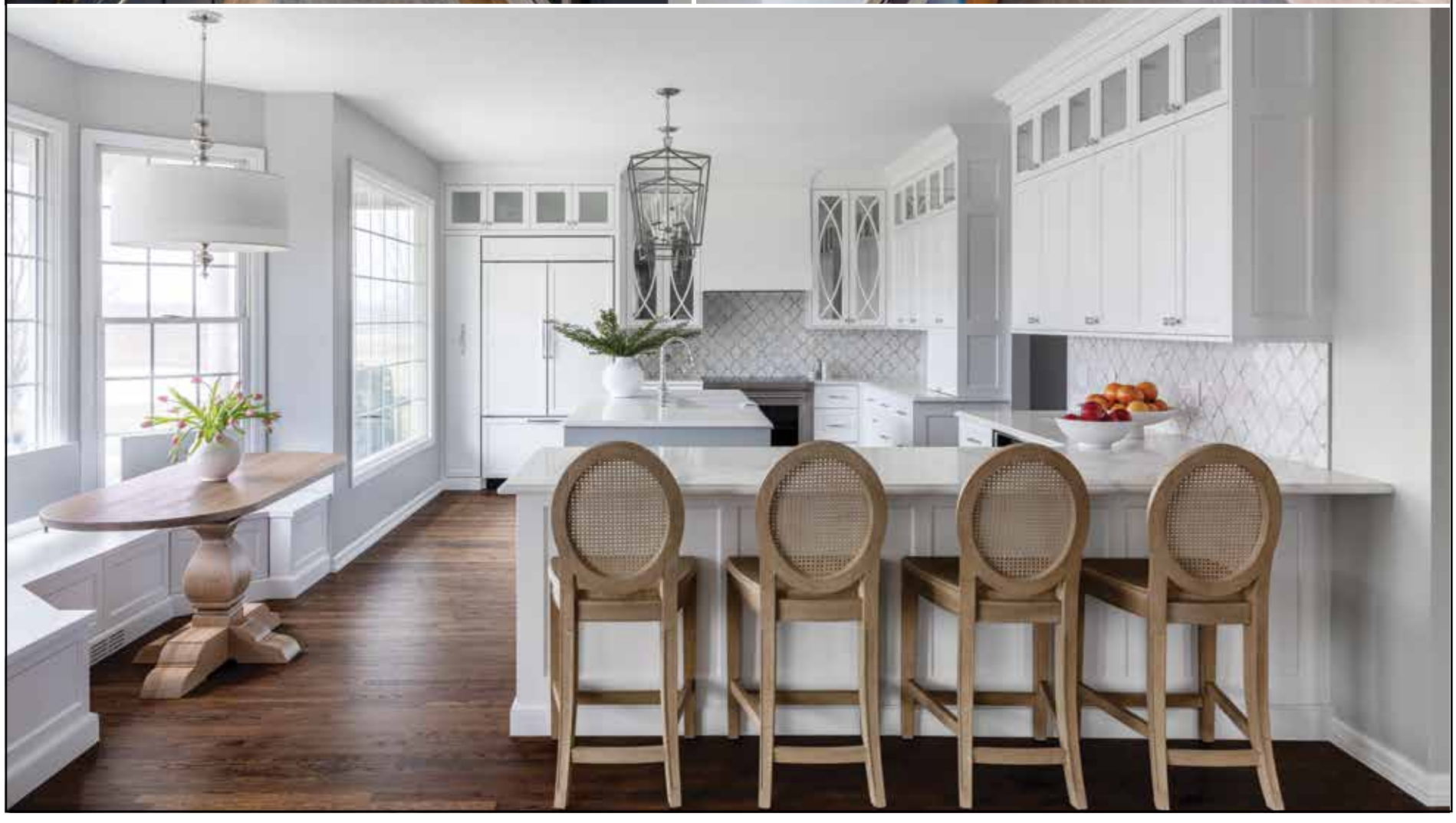

SAVE THE DATE
Annual Meeting
of the
Jewish Federation
Wednesday,
May 27, 2026
7pm
at the JCC of Greater
Ann Arbor

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